



WORD, BREATH, FLESH: THE PROCESSED GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by Ron Kangas

Axiomatic in any serious study of the divine revelation contained in the Scriptures is the principle of the twofoldness of the divine truth. This is the principle that every truth revealed in the Bible, especially the truths related to the Triune God and His purpose, has two sides, or aspects. Both aspects of every truth should be received by believers without bias or preference and without attempting to reconcile them or systematize them.

Regarding the understanding and application of this principle, we have been helped greatly by *The Twofoldness of Divine Truth*, a booklet written by Robert Govett, a meticulous and perceptive student of the Word of God. He observes, “The twofoldness of truth as offered to our view in Holy Writ is one strong argument of its not being the work of man” (3). The glory of human intellect, Govett goes on to argue, is to reduce various matters to one law and a single principle, eluding or denying anything that stands in the way of this. But God continually acts by two seemingly opposed principles, and thus it is “not then to be wondered at, if two seemingly opposed principles are found placed side by side in the Scripture. ‘Unity in plurality, plurality in unity’ is the main principle on which both the world and the Scripture are constructed” (4).

Addressing the issue of seemingly irreconcilable statements in the Word, Govett asserts that it is “not necessary to reconcile them before we are bound to receive and act upon the two,” since it is sufficient that God has affirmed both (6). “Their claim on our reception,” Govett says, “is not that we can unite them, but that God has testified both” (8). Truths that appear to be opposite “arise from different parts of the subject being viewed at different times” (9). If we realize this, we will readily see that many theological debates regarding the truths in the Bible are unnecessary.

For our benefit, Govett specifically applies the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth to the nature of God:

The same twofoldness of truth appears in the Scripture

statements concerning the nature of God. It affirms His unity...But the Scripture as plainly affirms the distinction of persons in the Godhead. “Unity in plurality and plurality in unity” is the assertion here. This master-truth, which takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead, flows out into all His works. (12)

Note Govett’s statement that this “master-truth...takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead.” This suggests that God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures, being twofold, is an expression of God’s nature as the Triune God. The two aspects of God’s eternal, intrinsic being—that He is three being one and one being three—are testified by the twofoldness of the truth of His revelation in the Scriptures.

This twofoldness of the truth concerning the Triune God is conveyed by the word *triune*, a Latin word composed of *tri-*, meaning three, and *-une*, meaning one. To say that God is triune is to testify that He is three-one, that He is uniquely one yet distinctly and inseparably three, since in the Godhead the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct but inseparable. The three of the Godhead cannot be separated, yet there is a distinction among them. This is the twofoldness of the truth concerning the Triune God and a marvelous instance—perhaps the most wonderful—of the principle of the twofoldness of the divine truth in the Bible.

This principle is seen in another element of the truth concerning God. The Bible reveals both that God is immutable in His essence and that God has been processed in His economy. *Processed* refers to the crucial and interdependent steps through which the Triune God has passed in the divine economy in order to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. We wish to make it emphatically clear that God’s process in His economy does not compromise His essential immutability, and God’s immutability in His essence does not preclude His process in His economy. In Himself, in His eternal Godhead, God is unchanging, for His essence is immutable and His nature is unalterable.

From eternity to eternity, He can never become either more or less than what He is. Nevertheless, this eternal, immutable, unchanging, unalterable God has, in Christ the Son and for the carrying out of His economy, passed through a process involving incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This process surely involves a sequence of steps in time, but it absolutely does not entail any change in the immutable essence of God.

God is immutable in His essence and in His attributes. The God who has revealed Himself as I Am—the self-existing, ever-existing One (Exo. 3:14)—speaks of Himself as the One who is, who was, and who is coming (Rev. 1:4). “There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be” (Pink 37). To say that God is immutable in His attributes is to testify that He is perfect and unchanging in His life, light, love, holiness, righteousness, glory, wisdom, knowledge,



power, grace, mercy, and all other attributes. His attributes are subject neither to development nor to deterioration. “Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever” (37).

The Gospel of John reveals that although the Triune God is eternally immutable in the Godhead essentially, He has been processed in His economy to become the Spirit.

In keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, we believe both in the immutability of God and in the process of God, both in His unchanging essence, nature, and attributes and in the steps He has taken and stages through which He has passed in His economy in order to enter into, dwell in, and be one with His people.¹ Whereas God’s immutability is related to His *being*, God’s process is related to His *becoming* (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45).² In particular, this process is related to the two becomings of Christ—His becoming flesh through incarnation (John 1:14) and His becoming the life-giving Spirit through resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45). These two becomings, as stages of Christ’s process, are an economical, not essential, matter, that is, changes that involve God’s economy but not God’s essence.

Change with God can only be economical; it can never be essential. Essentially, our God cannot change. From eternity to eternity He remains the same in His essence. But in His economy the Triune God has changed in the sense of being processed. (Lee, *Conclusion* 914-915)

This consideration of the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth as it pertains to the immutability and the economy of God brings us to the thesis of this essay: The Gospel of John is a revelation of the processed God. This Gospel reveals that although the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is eternally immutable in the Godhead essentially and the three of the Divine Trinity coexist and coinhere eternally (1:1-2, 18; 10:30; 14:10; 17:5, 24), God nevertheless, has been processed in His economy to become the Spirit (7:39). Thus, the Gospel of John is a wondrous revelation of the processed God, in brief, of God as the Word (1:1), the flesh (v. 14), and the breath (20:22). Without jeopardizing the eternal, immutable Triune God essentially, this Gospel unveils the glorious fact that, economically, God in Christ the Son has passed through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the

processed God for our experience and enjoyment of Him that we may be His corporate expression.

Incarnation

“The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (1:14). This refers explicitly

to the epochal process of incarnation, through which the Word as God Himself put on the human life and nature. The Word’s becoming flesh surely involved a process. Henry explains,

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

The Infinite God and the Finite Man

In His incarnation Christ brought the infinite God into the finite man. For Christ as God to be infinite means that He is free from all limitations and that everything that belongs to His being is without measure or quantity. As the infinite God Christ is self-existing and ever-existing, for He is the great I Am (8:58, 24, 28; 18:6). As the infinite God Christ is eternal and immortal (Micah 5:2; 1 Tim. 6:16) and is immutable and unchangeable (Heb. 1:8-12; 6:17). As the infinite God Christ is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, and as such He is unlimited

in all His attributes. Furthermore, as the infinite God Christ is the expression of God the Father and the effulgence of God's glory (John 1:18; Heb. 1:3).

As a finite man Christ in the flesh was neither self-existing nor ever-existing, was not omnipresent or omnipotent, and was limited in space and time (John 7:6). As a finite man Christ in the flesh was limited in knowledge (Matt. 24:36; Luke 2:40, 52; cf. John 7:15). As a finite man Christ in the flesh had a natural, human life, He had a dependent existence, and He could be put to death (10:11, 15, 17; 6:57; Matt. 14:19; 1 Pet. 3:18). Also, as a finite man Christ in the flesh did not manifest the glory of His divinity but concealed it within the shell of His humanity, releasing it through death and manifesting it in resurrection (John 12:23-24). Since through incarnation Christ brought the infinite God into the finite man, He, the God-man, is both the infinite God and a finite man. God is infinite, and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one. This is truly wonderful, mysterious, and mystical.

The Complete God Manifested in the Flesh

The New Testament reveals not only that the incarnate Christ is the infinite God and a finite man but also that He is the complete God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Christ is not merely one-third of God, God the Son, but the totality of God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—for in His incarnation He, the Son, came with the Father and by the Spirit (John 8:29; Matt. 1:18, 20). Thus, Christ in incarnation is the complete God, the Triune God, manifested in the flesh.

This is confirmed by 1 Timothy 3:16, which speaks of God manifested in the flesh, with *in the flesh* referring to Christ's coming in the form of a human being in the old creation (although, of course, without sin—Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). He was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, since the three of the Godhead, although distinct, are, due to their coinherence, inseparable. For this reason, the New Testament does not explicitly state that the Son of God was incarnated but instead declares that God was manifested in the flesh. When Christ the Son was incarnated, the entire God and not only the Son of God was incarnated; hence, Christ in His incarnation is the entire God manifested in the flesh.

Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John reveals that the Word, who is God, became flesh (vv. 1-2, 14).³ The God, who the Word is, is not a partial God—not only God the Son—but the entire God—God the Son, God the Father, and God the Spirit. Instead of saying that the Word, who became flesh, was God the Son, the New Testament indicates that the Word, who was in the beginning and who became flesh, is the entire Triune God. Furthermore, the

Word is God's definition, explanation, and expression; therefore, the Word who became flesh—the entire God manifested in the flesh—is God's definition, explanation, and expression in the flesh.

The Fullness of the Godhead

In Christ, the Word who became flesh, God manifested in the flesh, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col. 2:9). *All the fullness of the Godhead* involves the complete God, the entire Godhead. Because the Godhead includes the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The fact that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in Him.

Before Christ's incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him as the eternal Word, but not bodily. From the time that Christ became incarnate, clothed with a human body, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Him in a bodily way; and in His glorified body (Phil. 3:21) now and forever it dwells. (Recovery Version, Col. 2:9, note 3)

The infinite God was brought into the finite man, God was manifested in the flesh, and the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Christ bodily. If we ponder these marvelous divine realities, we will certainly realize that it cannot reasonably be denied that the incarnation involved a tremendous economical process.

Human Living

As the embodiment of the Triune God, Christ the Son passed through the process of human living—a living best characterized as the living of a God-man, and the Gospel of John gives us a penetrating view of this living.

Through incarnation the Father sent the Son and came with the Son by coming in the Son (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; John 14:10), and according to the Gospel of John, the Son consistently stood on the position of one sent by God the Father. As a man under God's authority, taking God as His head (1 Cor. 11:3), the Lord Jesus testified again and again that He had been sent into the world: "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God" (John 3:34). "My food," He testified, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (4:34). In 5:23 He said, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him," for He came not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him (v. 30). Later, He declared that the works which the Father had given Him to finish testified that the Father had sent Him (v. 36), and then He upbraided those who did not believe in the One whom God had sent (v. 38).

When the Lord was asked about what constituted the work of God, He answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom He has sent” (6:29). The living Father sent Him (v. 57); His teaching was not His own but His who sent Him (7:16); and the One who sent Him was with Him (8:16). In His prayer He said to the Father, “As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (17:18), and on the day of His resurrection, He said to His disciples, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (20:21).

Although the Lord Jesus, the God-man, was the infinite God, He lived as a finite man, limited in both space and time. When His brothers, who did not then believe in Him, suggested that He manifest Himself to the world (7:4), He replied, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready” (v. 6), indicating that in His human living He was limited in the matter of time.



In His human living, the God-man Jesus always denied Himself and His natural, human life and lived by

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the Father and for the Father. We may say, and we should say, that He lived the Father, speaking the Father's words, coming in the Father's name, accomplishing the Father's work, expressing the Father, and doing the Father's will. When His disciples urged Him to eat (4:31), He told them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (v. 32), and then He explained, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (v. 34). From Hebrews 10:7 we know that the Lord came to do the Father's will. In John 4 we see that His food was doing the will of Him who sent Him. He was supplied, nourished, satisfied, and strengthened by doing the Father's will.

With respect to carrying out the work of the Father, the Lord's attitude was expressed in the words *I also* in 5:17: “My Father is working until now, and I also am working.” *My Father* reveals that Jesus is the Son—the only begotten Son (1:18; 3:16) in the Godhead—and thus is the very God, Jehovah, the I Am (8:58); *I also* indicates not only His oneness with the Father in the work but also His

dependence upon Him as the unique source. In 5:19 His word regarding this is even more striking: “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.”⁴ The Lord Jesus utterly denied and renounced Himself, not taking the self as the source of anything in word, feeling, decision, or deed. Rather, taking the Father as the source and being dependent upon and submissive to the Father, He did whatever He saw the Father doing. Furthermore, the Son not only did what the Father was doing but did these things “in like manner,” that is, not in His own way according to His thought, feeling, and preference but absolutely according to the Father's way. Thus, in verse 30 He went on to say, “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.” He did nothing out from Himself, and He did not seek (much less do) His own will but the Father's will, accomplishing not His own works but the works which the Father had given Him to finish (v. 36).

We see further aspects of Christ's God-man living in chapters 6 and 7 of this Gospel: “I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (6:38). Standing in the position of a sent One under the Father's authority and headship, He did the Father's will, and in doing so He actually lived because of the Father. “The living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father” (v. 57). The Lord Jesus did not rely upon His sinless, natural, human life in doing the Father's work and will; on the contrary, He lived “because of the Father,” taking the Father as His source and life supply. As a result, He did not disseminate His own teaching or pursue glory for Himself. “My teaching is not Mine,” He testified, “but His who sent Me” (7:16), indicating thereby that the truths He released to fallen human beings sitting in the darkness of death were not the product of His own mind but had their origin in the being of the Father. Also, because He did not seek His own glory, He did not speak from Himself:

If anyone resolves to do His [the Father's] will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. 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. (vv. 17-18)

He did nothing from Himself, and He did not speak from Himself but from the Father: “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” (12:49). “The things therefore that I speak, even as the Father has said to Me, so I speak” (v. 50). He could truly say that His teaching actually was not His own—it was the Father’s teaching presented in the Father’s words according to the Father’s will for the Father’s glory.

In 8:26 the Lord Jesus said, “He who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him, these things I speak to the world.” Hearing the Father was central to the Lord’s life and ministry. “As I hear, I judge,” He assured us (5:30). He always told the truth which He heard from God (8:40). Shortly before His death He could say to His disciples, “All the things which I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you” (15:15). His speaking was based upon hearing the Father’s voice (5:37), for as prophesied concerning Him in Isaiah 50:4-5, He was given “the tongue of the instructed,” and His ear was awakened “to hear as an instructed one” (v. 4). The Father had opened His ear, and He was always obedient and faithful to what He heard. As a finite man He listened to the voice of the infinite God, His Father.

In His human living the Lord Jesus was always one with the Father in the way of coinherence, or mutual indwelling. In John 10:30 He declared, “I and the Father are one,” and in verse 38 He expressed His desire that we would “come to know and continue to know” that the Father is in Him and that He is in the Father. The Lord spoke further regarding this in 14:10: “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.” This is the oneness of coinherence, and the Lord spoke about it again in verse 11: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”

The Son came in the name of the Father (5:43), did the will of the Father, spoke the word of the Father, carried out the work of the Father, was one with Father, and sought the glory of the Father. As a result, He expressed the Father, not Himself, and for this reason He could say, “He who beholds Me beholds Him who sent Me” (12:45). When Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us” (14:8), the Lord Jesus replied, “Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father?” (v. 9). “You have not known Me?” “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” The Lord lived because of the Father and expressed the Father; therefore, to see Him was to see the Father. In a very real and practical sense and as a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, the Son in John 14 was the Father. To behold Him was to behold the Father who lived in Him, spoke through Him, worked in Him, and was glorified in Him. This was the God-man living of the

incarnate Son as the embodiment of the Triune God, and as such a God-man He died on the cross for our redemption and for the release of the divine life.

Crucifixion

Before we turn to a number of texts in the Gospel of John which unveil the significance of Christ’s redemptive death, we need to point out how, in a marvelous way, the twofold truth concerning immutability and process is exhibited in the crucifixion of Christ as the Lamb of God fulfilling the type of the Passover lamb. Two aspects of the type are relevant here: The lamb was to be roasted with fire (Exo. 12:9), but none of its bones were to be broken (v. 46). For the lamb to be roasted with fire points to a process that typifies Christ’s suffering under God’s holy wrath exercised in His judgment upon sin and sinners, as signified by fire. When Christ died a vicarious death on our behalf under God’s judgment, He was “roasted with fire,” and this surely was a process through which He (with God in Him) passed in God’s economy. This was the fulfillment of one aspect of the type.

However, when He was on the cross, His legs were not broken. Because of the oncoming great Sabbath and the preparation for it, the Jews asked of Pilate that the bodies would not remain on the cross, and thus they requested “that their legs might be broken” (John 19:31). Although the soldiers did in fact break the legs of the two men who were crucified with Jesus, “when they saw that He had already died, they did not break His legs” (v. 33). Significantly, in verse 36 we are given the following explanation: “These things happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘No bone of His shall be broken.’” “Christ’s unbroken bone signifies His unbreakable and indestructible eternal life” (Recovery Version, Exo. 12:46, note 1). This signifies that although the Lord’s physical life was terminated on the cross, His divine life, which is also resurrection life (John 11:25), could not be hurt or damaged by death or by any negative thing. As we consider the type and its fulfillment, we see both process and immutability: process in the fire that “roasted” the Lord Jesus in His humanity and immutability in His indestructible divine life signified by the bone.

The Lamb of God

In His death as depicted in the Gospel John, the Lord Jesus died as the Lamb of God, as a serpent in form, and as a grain of wheat. In 1:29 John the Baptist proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of world!” Although Satan injected sin, his poisonous nature, into the human race and although the nature of sin in fallen humankind has manifested itself in countless sins, the Lamb of God, by means of a redemptive death that satisfied the demands of God’s righteousness, holiness, and

glory, has taken away the sin of the world. As the Lamb of God, Christ died for the totality of sin, that is, sin in our nature and sins in our behavior. On the one hand, Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:28); on the other hand, He was made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21), and His death dealt with sin. Therefore, sins and sin were taken away by the Lamb of God, who died on the cross under God's judgment.

Christ as the Lamb of God is typified not only by the lamb of the Passover but also by the lamb provided in Genesis 22. When Isaac asked his father, Abraham, concerning the lamb for a burnt offering (v. 7), Abraham responded, "God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering" (v. 8). According to verse 13 God was faithful in His provision: "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering in place of his son" (v. 13). This thicket signifies humanity. "Christ as the Lamb of God was willing to have His 'horns' [fighting



As man He had genuine human blood, and as God He has the element that gives His blood eternal efficacy. It is in this sense that we speak of God's blood.

power] caught by His human nature that He might be offered to God as our Substitute (1 Pet. 3:18)"

(Recovery Version, Gen. 22:13, note 2). We should have gone to the cross to die for our own sin and sins, but God replaced us with the Lamb as our Substitute.⁵

Because the death of the Lord Jesus was the death of the God-man—the One who was the complete God and a perfect man—the blood He shed on the cross was regarded by Paul in Acts 20:28 as God's blood, when he charged the elders "to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." The antecedent of *His* here is *God*; hence, *His own blood* must be God's blood. To some, such a notion may be intolerable and unacceptable. "How could God have blood?" they are likely to ask. "God is Spirit," they may argue, appealing to John 4:24, "and a Spirit cannot have blood." All such arguments notwithstanding, Acts 20:28 refers to God's blood, and we need to have a proper understanding of this fact. Regarding this, the Gospel of John and the Epistle of 1 John are of great help. God as God in the Godhead

does not have blood and cannot have blood; however, God in the incarnation of Christ, that is, the God-man, surely does have blood. According to John's Gospel, the Word, who is God Himself, became flesh, and this Word-become-flesh is the Lamb of God who was crucified, shedding His precious blood (1 Pet. 1:19-20). Hence, the blood that has redeemed fallen human beings is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. As fallen human beings, we need genuine human blood for our redemption, and as a human being the Lord Jesus had human blood and shed human blood to redeem us. However, the Lord is also the Son of God, even God Himself, and with His blood there is the element of divinity. This divine element ensures the eternal efficacy of His blood. As man He had genuine human blood, and as God He has the element that gives His blood eternal efficacy. It is in this sense that we, with Paul, may speak of God's blood.

"The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). The name *Jesus* denotes the Lord's humanity, which was needed for the shedding of the redeeming blood. The title *His Son* denotes the Lord's divinity, which is needed for the eternal efficacy of the redeeming blood.

The blood of Jesus His Son indicates that this blood is the proper blood of a genuine human being for redeeming God's fallen creatures with the divine surety for its eternal efficacy. As a result, the blood shed by the Lord Jesus on the cross is eternal blood, and therefore Hebrews 9:12

says that the redemption accomplished by the God-man is eternal. For this to be true, the One who died had to be both God and man. We praise the Lord that He died on the cross as the God-man and that the blood He shed there was not only the blood of the man Jesus but also the blood of the God-man, God's own blood.

A Serpent in Form

Although it is widely recognized and believed that Christ died for our sins, not many know the meaning of His crucifixion as it relates to sin as the poisonous nature of Satan and also to Satan himself. In dealing with sin, Christ was made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21). Because God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin and because God made Christ sin on our behalf, when He was on the cross He was sin in the sight of God. The Lord Jesus 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 the Lamb who took away sin but also as sin itself. Through incarnation God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin

and concerning sin, and then through the death of Christ on the cross, God condemned sin in the flesh.

This brings us to John 3:14, which confirms and illustrates the truth in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 8:3: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” 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 (Num. 21:4-9). The bronze serpent was not a serpent with poison; rather, 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. In John 3:14 the Lord Jesus applied this type to Himself, thereby indicating that He, in His redemptive death, would become the fulfillment of this type by being lifted up on the cross, being made sin for us, and dying for us.⁶

Christ’s death on the cross was therefore the means by which God destroyed the devil (Heb. 2:14). When Christ was lifted up in the form of a serpent and in the likeness of the flesh of sin and when sin in the flesh was judged by the righteous God, Satan was destroyed and cast out. As John 12:31-32 reveals, the casting out of the ruler of this world—Satan—is connected to the death of Christ on the cross. Through incarnation the Lord Jesus, the Word who had become flesh, put on the likeness of the flesh of sin and crucified it. In this way, Satan, who had injected himself into humankind as sin, was destroyed, annulled, brought to nought, as Hebrews testifies. Christ partook of blood and flesh for the purpose of destroying the devil. This indicates clearly that apart from the incarnation, in which Christ took upon Himself the flesh of sin, and the crucifixion, in which He dealt with sin, there would have been no way for God to destroy Satan. But through the death of Christ the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 has been fulfilled: The seed of the woman—Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man—has crushed the head of the serpent. Sin has been judged, and Satan has been destroyed.

A Grain of Wheat

Now we need to see that through that same all-inclusive death the divine life was released from within the “shell” of the Lord’s humanity. He spoke about this 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 *grain of wheat* is Christ in His incarnation as the God-man, the embodiment of the divine life, the eternal life, the life of God. God has given to us eternal life, but this life, which is actually God Himself as life, is in His Son (1 John 5:11). In Him was life (John 1:4), and through incarnation He, the infinite God, became a finite man and thus, metaphorically speaking, a grain of wheat.

It was God’s intention, for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose by His eternal life, that the life which was in Christ the Son would become the life which is in us, those who believe into the Son. In order for this to take place, the life that was in the incarnated Christ—the life in the grain of wheat—would need to be released and then imparted into the believers (3:15-16). The release of this life is through death, and for this release of life, the Lord Jesus, as a grain of wheat, did not abide alone; instead (and this is glorious) He fell into the ground and died. This means that His human shell was broken through death so that the divine life within Him could be released and then dispensed into us.

This release of the divine life from within the Lord is signified by the water that flowed out of His pierced side. “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water” (19:34). Here we see the two aspects of the Lord’s death—the aspect related to redemption (blood) and the aspect related to the release and impartation of life (water). This is worthy of careful attention:

Two substances came out of the Lord’s pierced side: blood and water. 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). The Lord’s death, on the negative side, takes away our sins, and on the positive side, imparts life into us. Hence, it has two aspects: the redemptive aspect and the life-imparting aspect. The redemptive aspect is for the life-imparting aspect. The record of the other three Gospels portrays only the redemptive aspect of the Lord’s death; John’s record portrays not only the redemptive aspect but also the life-imparting aspect. In Matt. 27:45, 51, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44-45, darkness, a symbol of sin, appeared, and the veil of the temple, which separated man from God, was rent. These signs are related to the redemptive aspect of the Lord’s death. The words spoken by the Lord on the cross in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them,” and in Matt. 27:46, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (because He bore our sin at that time), also depict the redemptive aspect of His death. But the flowing water and the unbroken bone mentioned by John in vv. 34 and 36 are signs that relate to the life-imparting aspect of the Lord’s death...This death that imparts life released the Lord’s divine life from within Him for the producing of the church, which is composed of all His believers, into whom His divine life has been imparted. This life-imparting death of the Lord’s is typified by Adam’s sleep, out from which Eve was produced (Gen. 2:21-23), and is signified by the death of the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground for the bringing forth of many grains (12:24) to make the one bread—the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). Hence, it

is also the life-propagating, life-multiplying death, the generating and reproducing death. (Recovery Version, John 19:34, note 1)

The death of Christ as the Lamb of God, as the serpent in form, and as the grain of wheat was undoubtedly a process, and the Triune God, who is immutable in the Godhead, although He did not die, passed through the process of death in the God-man Jesus. The God revealed in the incarnation of the Word, in the human living of the Lord Jesus, the God-man, and in the redemptive and life-releasing death of Christ is surely the processed God—the Triune God in His economy.

Resurrection

In the Gospel of John resurrection denotes not only a future event (5:28-29) but also a person and a process (11:23-25; 12:24), and it therefore occupies a place of special importance in this Gospel. *The third day* (2:1)



The death of Christ as the Lamb of God, as the serpent in form, and as the grain of wheat was a process, and the Triune God passed through the process of death in the God-man Jesus.

and *in three days* (vv. 19-20) both refer to resurrection. When the Lord Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in

three days I will raise it up” (v. 19), He was speaking of the temple of His body and was actually prophesying concerning His death and resurrection. Through crucifixion the temple of the Lord’s physical body would be destroyed, but in resurrection this temple would be reared up on a vastly larger scale to become Christ’s mystical Body. In His resurrection Christ became the first-fruits of resurrection offered to the Father for His satisfaction (20:1, 17; Lev. 23:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23). In His resurrection Christ brought forth the corporate child, the corporate new man, which includes Himself and His many brothers (John 16:19-22; 20:17; Rom. 8:29). In His resurrection on the first day of the week, Christ germinated the new creation with Himself as the life element (John 20:1; 2 Cor. 5:17).

As a process through which the Lord Jesus passed in God’s economy, resurrection was His multiplication, glorification, and transfiguration.

Multiplication

Christ’s resurrection was His multiplication, His reproduction. The fact that, in God’s economy, Christ can be multiplied, reproduced, is revealed in John 12:24, where the Lord Jesus speaks of a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying and then bearing much fruit, many grains. To be sure, the many grains are the multiplication and the reproduction of the original grain. Christ died as a grain of wheat, releasing the divine life from within Him, and in His resurrection the released divine life was imparted into God’s chosen and redeemed people, causing them to be regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3).

This multiplication of Christ involves the two aspects of His divine sonship—the aspect of Christ’s being the only begotten Son in the Godhead and the aspect of Christ’s being the firstborn Son in God’s economy. From eternity to eternity Christ, in the immutable Godhead, is the only begotten Son of God (John 1:18; 3:16). As the only begotten Son of God, Christ is unique, and as such He cannot be multiplied or reproduced, and thus He cannot have brothers. It is in the second aspect of His

sonship that Christ has been multiplied and has many brothers. This gave Paul the ground to speak of Him as “the Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). Christ’s being the firstborn Son refers to Him in resurrection, when, with His humanity, He was “designated the Son

of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead” (1:4). As the only begotten Son, He is the Son of God only in His divinity, but as the firstborn Son, He is the Son of God both in His divinity and in His humanity. Paul spoke concerning this in Acts 13:33: “God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; this day have I begotten You.’” If we consider this verse together with Romans 1:3-4, we will see that when Christ was resurrected, His humanity was begotten to be the Son of God, and thus He was designated the Son of God in His humanity and as well as in His divinity. In His divinity He already was, and always will be, the only begotten Son of God, but through His resurrection His humanity became the Son of God also, and the many sons of God, who are the many brothers of Christ (Heb. 2:10-11), were brought forth. Because He had become the firstborn Son in His resurrection and because the many sons of God had been begotten by God in the Son’s resurrection, the Lord Jesus could say to Mary, “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17):

Previously, the most intimate term the Lord had used in reference to His disciples was “friends” (15:14-15). But after His resurrection He began to call them “brothers,” for through His resurrection His disciples were regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3) with the divine life, which had been released by His life-imparting death, as indicated in 12:24. He was the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died and grew up to bring forth many grains for the producing of the one bread, which is His Body (1 Cor. 10:17). He was the Father’s only Son, the Father’s individual expression. Through His death and resurrection the Father’s only Begotten became the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). His many brothers are the many sons of God and are the church (Heb. 2:10-12), a corporate expression of God the Father in the Son. This is God’s ultimate intention. The many brothers are the propagation of the Father’s life and the multiplication of the Son in the divine life. Hence, in the Lord’s resurrection God’s eternal purpose is fulfilled. (Recovery Version, John 20:17, note 2)

Glorification

That Christ’s resurrection was His glorification is unveiled in Luke 24:26: “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?” This refers to the Lord’s resurrection, which brought Him into glory (1 Cor. 15:43; Acts 3:13, 15). The intrinsic connection between resurrection and glorification is strongly emphasized in the Gospel of John (7:39; 12:23; 13:31-32; 17:1, 4-5).

When God as the Word became flesh, the glory of Christ’s divinity was concealed within the “shell” of His humanity. One day, while He was with three of His disciples on a mountain, He was transfigured before them as the glory of His divinity shined forth from within His humanity (Matt. 17:1-2). This was, however, a temporary glorification, and the Lord forbade His disciples to speak of it until He was raised from the dead (v. 9). When He was crucified, the divine element was released from His human shell, and then on the third day He “was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4), that is, through the manifestation of divinity, causing His body to become “the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21), a body permeated and saturated with God’s glory.

Before the Lord Jesus died, He spoke concerning His glorification and prayed for it. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” He declared in John 12:23, referring to His coming resurrection as revealed in the following verse. In 13:31 He went on to say, “Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him.” On the night before He was crucified, He prayed, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You” (17:1). This was followed by a

similar petition: “Glorify Me along with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (v. 5):

This is the subject of the Lord’s prayer in this chapter. He was God incarnated in the flesh, and His flesh was a tabernacle in which God could dwell on earth (1:14). His divine element was confined in His humanity, just as God’s shekinah glory had been concealed within the tabernacle. Once, on the mountain of transfiguration, His divine element was released from within His flesh and expressed in glory, being seen by the three disciples (Matt. 17:1-4; John 1:14). But then it was concealed again in His flesh. Before this prayer He predicted that He would be glorified and that the Father would be glorified in Him (12:23; 13:31-32). Now He was about to pass through death so that the concealing shell of His humanity might be broken and His divine element, His divine life, might be released. Also, He would resurrect that He might uplift His humanity into the divine element and that His divine element might be expressed, with the result that His entire being, His divinity and His humanity, would be glorified. The Father would thus be glorified in Him. (Recovery Version, John 17:1, note 1)

God answered the Son’s prayer, gloriously, by raising Him from the dead (Acts 3:13, 15).

Transfiguration

Christ’s resurrection was His transfiguration into the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).⁷ This crucial matter can only be delineated here. Three key passages in the Gospel of John reveal that as a result of His glorification through resurrection Christ is now the Spirit for us to receive, experience, and enjoy.

In 7:37 the Lord Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” In verse 38 He continued, “He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” This word about rivers of living water concerns the Spirit: “But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” Whereas some insert *given* after *the Spirit was not yet*, we take the text as it is and disagree with the common practice of adding *given*. The verse is actually saying that the Spirit was *not yet* because Jesus had *not yet* been glorified. *Not yet* implies a process in time, indicating that something is not yet, but in the future it will be, and so it is here. The first *not yet*, concerning the Spirit, is dependent on the second *not yet*, which is related to the glorification of the God-man Jesus. This means that after the second *not yet* had been fulfilled, the first *not yet* would take place also.

When Jesus was glorified in resurrection, a change took place economically, not essentially, in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God, who is the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), became in God's economy the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ:

The Spirit of God was there from the beginning (Gen. 1:1-2), but at the time the Lord spoke this word, the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19), was not yet, because the Lord had not yet been glorified. Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected (Luke 24:26). After Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Jesus Christ, who was breathed into the disciples by Christ in the evening of the day on which He was resurrected (20:22). The Spirit is now the "another Comforter," the Spirit of reality promised by Christ before His death (14:16-17). When the Spirit was the Spirit of God, He had only the divine element. After He became the Spirit of Jesus Christ through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, the Spirit had



The resurrected Christ breathed Himself into the disciples as the breath, the promised Spirit of reality, in order to be in them as their life, life supply, and everything.

both the divine element and the human element, with all the essence and reality of the incarnation, crucifixion, and

resurrection of Christ. Hence, the Spirit is now the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ as the living water for us to receive (vv. 38-39). (Recovery Version, John 7:39, note 1)

This understanding of John 7:39 is strengthened by the Lord's word in 14:16-18. In verse 16 the Lord Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever." Who is the "another Comforter"? In verse 17 the Lord explains, "Even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you." The another Comforter, we see here, is the Spirit of reality. The disciples knew this Spirit of reality because He abode with them. The One whom the disciples knew surely was the Lord Jesus. However, the Lord spoke of the Spirit of reality being with them and used the pronoun *He* to denote this Spirit. But in verse 18 this *He* becomes *I*: "I will not

leave you as orphans; I am coming to you." Thus, the *He* who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the *I*—the Lord Jesus—in verse 18, indicating that the Christ who was in the flesh and *with* the disciples would go through death and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ, *in* the disciples. Therefore, the resurrected Christ, the One who was "coming" to them (v. 3), is the Spirit of reality.

The "coming" prophesied in verse 18 was fulfilled in 20:19-22. The resurrected Jesus "came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be to you" (v. 19). After He showed them His hands and His side and after He commissioned them, "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). In so doing, the resurrected Christ, the pneumatic Christ, breathed Himself into the disciples as the holy *pneuma*, the holy breath, the promised Spirit of reality, in order to be not only with them but also in them as their life, their life supply, and their everything.

In the Gospel of John we have the Word, the flesh, and the breath. The Word, who is God Himself, became flesh, the God-man Jesus. This God-man, after living a life of expressing God and carrying out the work of God, died as the Lamb of God, a serpent in form, and a grain of wheat to deal with sins, destroy the devil, and impart the divine life. Then He was resurrected physical-

ly with a glorified body and spiritually as the life-giving Spirit to be the holy breath. As we survey this marvelous scene from 1:1 through 20:22 we see that in the process of God's economy, the Word became flesh, and the flesh became breath. This is the processed God in the Gospel of John. **AFC**

Notes

¹The processed God is radically different from the God of process theology, which is based upon a philosophical system that views God and the universe as existing in a state of perpetual process, evolution, and development. In process theology, reality is regarded essentially as an ongoing evolutionary process, and God is viewed as part of the process. This necessitates the concept of a changing God, a God without an immutable nature, who is changing, learning, growing, and developing along with the universe. Instead of "I Am," God is now "I am becoming." Nash remarks,

The classical Christian doctrine of divine immutability is replaced by the notion of a changing God...God literally experiences and exemplifies process...God's perfection is being attained successively; God is continually

growing or developing in perfection...Process thinkers insist that God actually receives something from the world; the world adds something to God, something which he would otherwise lack...God is involved in an endless process of change. (16-18, 20)

²Henry remarks, "In the Christian view divine becoming...contrasts at once with ancient Greek notions of abstract being and becoming, and with modern process theology's misconceptions of divine becoming that postulate change in the very nature of God" (369).

³Footnote 2 for John 1:2 in the Recovery Version of the Bible states,

In the beginning, that is, from eternity past, the Word was with God. Contrary to what is supposed by some, it is not that Christ was not with God and was not God from eternity past, and that at a certain time Christ became God and was with God. Christ's deity is eternal and absolute. From eternity past to eternity future, He is with God and He is God.

⁴In *Soul and Spirit*, Jessie Penn-Lewis notes,

Let us look at some passages in John's Gospel, and note the Lord's words about His own attitude as to reliance upon Himself and His own "powers"—which in His case were sinless powers...How marvellous to read that the Lord Jesus Christ said "*The Son can do nothing of Himself*". In no case did He originate His own activities. He did, He said, just what He saw the Father do...*That* was the position He took. (73-74)

⁵In *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Witness Lee states,

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. He is not only the sin offering but also the trespass offering, the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the wave offering, the heave offering, the free-will offering, and the drink offering. 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. (302)

⁶In *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Witness Lee states,

We need to be very clear that Christ was a serpent in form but that He did not have the poisonous nature of a serpent. We, however, actually are serpentine, for in our

fallen nature we are children of the old serpent, the devil (1 John 3:10). For this reason, in Matthew 12:34 the Lord Jesus called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers." In Matthew 23:33 He called them "serpents, brood of vipers," the offspring of the most poisonous kind of serpents. Because the devil is the father of sinners (John 8:44), sinners are children of the devil. Sinners also are serpents, the offspring of vipers. Therefore, in the sight of God, in our fallen nature we are not only sinful—we are serpentine. (307)

Because this is our deplorable and incurable condition, we surely needed the Lord Jesus to be lifted up on the cross in fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent so that sin could be judged and our sinful nature could be dealt with by God.

⁷The reader should not suppose that in asserting that Christ in resurrection is the Spirit of reality, the holy breath (John 20:22), the life-giving Spirit, and the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18), we are denying or minimizing the fact that Christ resurrected with a body and that in resurrection He has a glorified spiritual body of flesh and bones. We are familiar with Luke 24:36-39, and we believe it fully. When the Lord in resurrection suddenly stood in the midst of the disciples, "they were terrified and became frightened and thought they beheld a spirit [a specter]" (v. 37). The Lord comforted them, saying, "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you behold Me having" (v. 39). Then, offering further evidence that He was a resurrected man with a body of flesh and bones, He took a piece of broiled fish and ate before them (vv. 42-43). There is no doubt that the resurrected Christ has such a spiritual body of flesh and bones. Nevertheless, in keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, we believe both aspects of Christ's resurrection. We believe that in resurrection He has a spiritual body of flesh and bones, and we believe that in resurrection He is the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, dwelling in and mingled with the regenerated spirit of the believers.

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