

AFFIRMATION & CRITIQUE

MONOGRAPHS

THE CORPORATE GOD
IN THE
ECONOMY OF GOD

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THE CORPORATE GOD IN THE ECONOMY OF GOD

by Ron Kangas

The desire of God's heart, the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5), expressed as His eternal purpose (3:11), is to gain in and through redeemed humanity a corporate expression of Himself. In the present age this corporate expression is the Body of Christ (1:22-23; 4:4, 16); in the coming age and in eternity this corporate expression will be the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). In order to carry out His purpose and thereby fulfill the desire of His heart, God has an economy—His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything, becoming one with them, mingling with them, working Himself into them, and constituting them into a corporate entity for His glorious expression in Christ His firstborn Son with the believers as His many sons (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10). This grand economy of God is dependent upon a process that involves both the Triune God and His redeemed elect and that issues in a marvelous, corporate, divine and human organism, to which we give the designation *the corporate God*. It is the object of this essay to explain, in an introductory way, what is meant by the term *the corporate God* and what it means to affirm, as we emphatically do, that the eternal, immutable Triune God has, in His economy, through His redemption, and in union with His regenerated people, become the corporate God, or, as it may be preferable to say, the "four-in-one God."¹

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If we would know the corporate God in the economy of God as revealed in the Word of God, we need to be impressed with God's desire to be one with us and live a grafted life with us, to see that God's will is to produce, in Christ, the one new man as a corporate person for His expression, and to realize that God's becoming one with us and our becoming one with Him for His corporate expression require our deification—a process in God's complete, organic salvation (Rom. 5:10; Heb. 7:25) whereby we become God in life, nature, constitution, appearance, and expression but not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship.²

God's Desire to Be One with Humanity

Deep within the heart of God, there is a longing, a yearning, to be one with the human beings created by Him in His image as vessels to contain Him according to His will (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 9:23; Rev. 4:11). Corresponding to this divine longing, there is in the Bible a crucial, governing principle, and this is the principle of God making Himself one with His chosen and redeemed people. This divine principle is intrinsically related to the divine longing, with the principle in God's Word embodying and conveying the yearning in God's heart.

A Mutual Longing

God is love, and He desires to make Himself one with His chosen and redeemed people, who are the objects of His love. Motivated by such a love, He created us with a spirit to receive Him and contain Him, and He gave His only begotten Son as an offering for sin that we might be redeemed and justified, and now He pours Himself—the Triune God of love—into our being, flooding us and saturating us with Himself. Motivated by His loving desire to be one with us, He longs to join Himself to us, to unite Himself with us, to dispense Himself into us, to mingle Himself with us, to work Himself into us, and to incorporate us into Himself so that, in Christ, we may live with the Triune God a life of coinherence, of mutual indwelling (John 14:20; 15:4-5). Instead of being satisfied with a mere objective oneness in which God and His people live peacefully in the same realm, usually understood as heaven, our God yearns to make Himself one with us organically, subjectively, and intrinsically. He

intends to be one with us to the extent that, being grafted into Him (to be defined later), we are blended with Him and actually become parts of Him, even as the branches are parts of the vine and the members are parts of the body. A hymn that praises the Lord for His love beautifully and profoundly expresses this divine yearning: “O how deep and how far-reaching / Is Thy love, dear Lord, to me! / Far beyond my pow’r to fathom, / Deeper than the deepest sea! / It has caused Thee death to suffer / And to me Thyself impart, / That in Thee I might be grafted / And become of Thee a part” (*Hymns*, #152). In fulfilling the longing in His own being, God in Christ imparts Himself to us, grafts us into Himself, and—wonder of wonders!—causes us to become part of Him.

The God who desires to be one with us created us with a desire to be one with Him, and for this He formed within us a special organ, the human spirit, by which we can contact Him, receive Him, contain Him, and be one with Him. “He also has planted eternity in men’s heart and mind [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun, but only God, can satisfy]” (Eccl. 3:11, *Amplified Bible*). As tripartite vessels composed of spirit and soul and body designed to contain God (1 Thes. 5:23), we can be satisfied only when we are one with Him, filled with Him, and possessed by Him as we give Him all the ground in our being and pray to be saturated with Him. Thus, there is a mutual longing—a yearning in God to become one with us and a yearning in us to become one with Him. Only when the divine Spirit is joined to the human spirit through regeneration can this mutual longing be fulfilled.

As we seek the Lord in prayer, we need to be conscious of His longing to be one with us, and as we read the Scriptures, we need to be cognizant of the principle related to God’s making Himself one with His redeemed people. If we would understand the Bible, we need to pay attention to the basic principle of the Bible. “This principle is that God planned in His economy to make Himself one with man...When we read the Bible, we need to keep the principle of God’s being one with man...God’s main purpose is to make Himself one with man and to make man one with Him” (Lee, *Psalms* 200).

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In the Bible this principle is illustrated in a number of striking ways, two of which are the oneness in the divine romance portrayed in Song of Songs and the oneness of eating Christ as the bread of life revealed in John 6. The subject of Song of Songs is the progressive experience of an individual believer's loving fellowship with Christ. As this fellowship develops and the seeker (the lover) grows in life, she becomes increasingly one with the Lord (the Beloved). In Song of Songs 3:11 "the lover of Christ and Christ are united to be one in the bridal love and marriage life. This portrays the church and Christ being united to be completely and fully one organically in the mingled spirit (1 Cor. 6:17)" (Lee, Recovery Version, S. S. 3:11, note 1). Eventually, through the growth and transformation of life, the lover becomes a duplication of the Beloved, "the same as He is in life, in nature, in image, and in function, but not in His Godhead (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2)" (Lee, Recovery Version, S. S. 1:1, note 1). This is the oneness between the believer and Christ in the love union of the divine romance.

In John 6 the Lord Jesus presents Himself as bread for us to eat, speaking of Himself as the true bread, the bread of life, the living bread, the bread of God, and the bread that came down out of heaven. This bread is not for us to analyze or merely to appreciate; Christ as the true, living, divine, heavenly bread is for us to eat, digest, and assimilate. To eat is to contact things outside of us and to receive them into us, with the result that they are assimilated organically into our being and thereby become our constitution. To eat the Lord Jesus, therefore, is to receive Him into us that He may be assimilated as the life supply to our regenerated being. This eating of the Lord implies both dispensing and mingling: the dispensing of the processed Triune God into us to be our life and life supply and the mingling of this life element with our tripartite being. What takes place when we eat, digest, and assimilate food illustrates the oneness that God desires to have with us. Just as the food we eat and digest becomes one with us organically to be the constituent of our physical being, so Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God in the form of bread, through our eating and digesting of Him becomes one with us organically and intrinsically to be the constituent of our spiritual being. This is oneness at the most profound level.

A Grafted Life

The Bible reveals that the relationship which God desires to have with humanity is that He and the human beings created by Him would become one. God intends that the divine life and the human life would be joined together and become one in an organic union, a union of life (Rom. 6:3-5; 11:24). This joining involves the grafting of the human life into the divine life, the grafting of human beings into God, issuing in a grafted life, wherein the divine life and the human life are joined to become one life. Thus, God created man for the purpose of entering into man to be one with man and to make man one with Him. We were created to be like God and to be one with God. In order to fulfill this purpose, God created humankind in His image and according to His likeness and with a spirit to contact Him, receive Him, contain Him, and be one with Him.

God then placed man in front of the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9), indicating His desire to be one with man and to be man's life, life supply, and everything. The tree of life is for us to eat so that we may be constituted with God as the element of life; thus, we and God become organically united and live together as one person. Moreover, we not only eat of the tree of life but also abide in this tree as its branches. This is in keeping with the revelation of the true vine in John 15. Christ is both the vine tree (v. 1) and the life (11:25; 14:6), proving that He is the tree of life. We as believers in Christ are the branches absorbing all that the tree is and has, and we also abide in this tree and thereby have our existence in this tree. This is a picture of the grafted life that God desires to live with His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people.

The principle of grafting is that two similar lives are joined and then grow together organically. Because our human life was made in the image of God and according to the likeness of God, it can be joined to the divine life (Gen. 1:26). The human life resembles the divine life; therefore, the divine life and the human life can be grafted together, live together, and grow together.

This similarity is evident in the creation of the human spirit (2:7; Prov. 20:27). God created humankind with the breath of life for a

spirit so that human beings may contact God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), receive Him into their spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), and be one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The breath of life in Genesis 2:7 is neither the life of God nor the Spirit of God but is similar to God's life and God's Spirit. In fact, the breath of life breathed into the human body became the human spirit, and as a result, the human life with the human spirit resembles the divine life and the divine Spirit. Because of this resemblance, this similarity, the divine life and the human life can be joined, and through regeneration, the two spirits can become one spirit, the mingled spirit. This is the grafted life.

Regarding the grafted life, we need to avoid the erroneous teaching concerning the so-called exchanged life. The grafted life is not an exchanged life, a notion promulgated by certain Christian teachers. According to the concept of an exchanged life, the Lord requires us to give up our inferior life in exchange for His superior life, asking us to yield our human life to Him so that He may give us the divine life in exchange. The genuine Christian life, however, is not an exchanged life but a grafted life—the mingling of the human life and the divine life. Instead of an exchange, or trade, of lives, there is the infusing of the divine life into the human life and the mingling of the divine life and the human life, with the result that the human life lives by the divine life, and the divine life lives through the human life. This is precisely what is revealed in Galatians 2:20.

The most wonderful reality in the Christian experience is that the believers in Christ are united with Christ in the way of life. Whatever Christ is and whatever He has done are for one thing: that He and we can be organically united and live a grafted life.

In the grafted life the human life is not eliminated; on the contrary, the human life is strengthened, uplifted, and enriched by the divine life. In the words of a hymn by A. B. Simpson, "A poor tree with better grafted, / Richer, sweeter life doth gain" (*Hymns*, #482). The "richer, sweeter life," the divine life, is infused into the lower life. The human life retains its essential, God-created characteristics, but it is uplifted and transformed by being grafted into a better, higher life. The higher life also subdues the lower life, and then the higher life enriches, uplifts, and transforms the lower life.

Furthermore, in the grafted life the divine life works within us to discharge the negative elements, to swallow up our defects and infirmities, to uplift our faculties, and to resurrect our God-created and redeemed being. Eventually, in the grafted life the divine life will saturate our entire being, causing us to be sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified.

In order for us to be grafted into Christ, He had to pass through, in God's economy, the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Christ, the Son of God, became flesh to be the son of David, the branch of David (John 1:14; Matt. 1:1; Zech. 3:8; Jer. 23:5; 33:15), in order that we might be grafted together with Him. Since, as human beings, we are branches, pieces of wood, Christ came through incarnation to be the same as we are, thus making it possible for us to be grafted into Him.

Grafting requires cutting, and for the purpose of grafting, Christ was "cut" on the cross. After He was "cut" through crucifixion, He was resurrected with a spiritual body of flesh and bones, and in His resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit, ready for grafting (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). Now by believing into Him as the Son of God (John 3:15), we enter into Him to be one with Him, and He enters into us to be one with us, thereby fulfilling the mutual longing in God and in us to become one in life and live a grafted life together.

The basis of our becoming one with the Lord in this way is God's judicial redemption. Because of the fall of humankind into sin, the way to the tree of life—signifying God in Christ as life in the form of food—was closed to us and was guarded by God's righteousness, holiness, and glory (Gen. 3:22-24). But the redemptive death of Christ on our behalf fulfilled all the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, and the way to the tree of life has been reopened. Now it is possible for God to contact us and be one with us and for us to contact God and be one with Him. When we repented, believed into the Lord, and received Him, Christ as the life-giving Spirit entered into our spirit, bringing the divine life into us, causing us to be born of God to become children of God, and making Himself one with us and us one with Him in the mingled

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spirit. This means that after we have been grafted into Christ, we should no longer live by ourselves; rather, we should allow the pneumatic Christ—Christ as the life-giving Spirit—to live in us (Gal. 2:20). This fulfills the Lord's word in John 14:19: "Because I live, you also shall live." This kind of living involves the essence of the New Testament, the principle of incarnation, and the Body of Christ.

The Essence of the New Testament

The essence of the New Testament is the two spirits—the divine Spirit and the human spirit—mingled together as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4). The expression *one spirit* indicates the mingling of the Lord as the Spirit with our spirit. This spirit, which is the mingling of our regenerated spirit and the Lord's Spirit into one spirit, is both the Spirit of the Lord and our spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Here we have the deepest mystery in the Scriptures—the union of the Spirit of God and the spirit of man (1 Cor. 2:11-14). The focal point of God's economy is this mingled spirit, in which we live a grafted life with the resurrected, pneumatic Christ. All that God intends to accomplish for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose is related to this focal point. Ultimately, as we will see, God intends to deify us, making us God in life and nature but not in the Godhead for His corporate expression. It is an astounding fact that the mingled spirit is a spirit that is one with God and that is the same as God in His life and nature but not in His Godhead (1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4). Because the divine Spirit and the regenerated human spirit are mingled as one within us, we can live a grafted life, a life in the organic union with the Triune God in Christ. By living a grafted life, we live the life of a God-man—a life that is God yet man and man yet God (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:19-21).

The Principle of Incarnation

The God-man life is according to the principle of incarnation. "The principle of incarnation / Is but the blend of God and man, / Both acting in cooperation / To thus fulfill th' eternal plan" (*Hymns*, #740). The principle of incarnation is that God, instead of working unilaterally to carry out His economy, works in, with, and through the believers as one entity in the organic union. The Christian life is actually a life in the principle of incarnation. This is a life where

we, the believers in Christ, who have been grafted into Him, live with Him a life of two persons mingled together and living together as one. As manifested in the grafted life, the principle of incarnation is that God enters into man and mingles Himself with man to make Himself one with man, with the result that God is in man and man is in God.

We can see the experience of the grafted life in the principle of incarnation in Galatians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 7. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, on the one hand, "It is no longer I who live"; on the other hand, he says, "Christ... lives in me" and "I live." The old "I"—the "I" who no longer lives—is the "I" without God, the "I" who was crucified with Christ. The new "I"—the "I" who now lives by faith in the Son of God—is the "I" into whom God has been added. The living of the old "I" was the living of a person without Christ; the living of the new "I" is a living of a person in the organic union with Christ. Christ lives in us, and we live; this is a matter of two persons being one to have one life and one living. This is the principle of incarnation in the grafted life.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 according to the principle of two persons living as one person, and his speaking here reveals the highest spirituality based on the principle of incarnation. In the New Testament the Lord Jesus becomes one with His apostles, and they become one with Him. Because they speak together with Him, His word becomes their word, and whatever they speak is honored by the Lord as His word. As Paul was writing this chapter, he was one with the Lord, living according to his word in 6:17: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Paul's speaking, therefore, was in the principle of incarnation, with the Lord speaking in him and with him. Paul was one with the Lord to the extent that he knew the Lord's heart and mind, and when he gave his own opinion (7:25), he could say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (v. 40). Here we see the highest spirituality—the spirituality of a man who was so one with the Lord in the organic union of the grafted life and who was thoroughly permeated and saturated with Him that even his opinion expressed the Lord's mind. Whereas some may cling to the Old Testament principle of speaking for God—"Thus saith the Lord" (Isa. 10:24; Jer. 2:2)—those who are enlightened concerning the oneness

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of the believers with the Lord in God's New Testament economy will live according to the principle of incarnation—"I [the speaker] charge" (1 Cor. 7:10), for the Lord and the speaker are one.

A Life of Coinherence

As signified by the vine and the branches in John 15, in the organic union of the grafted life we are joined to Christ in the way of coinherence (John 14:20; 15:1, 4-5). We, as persons, dwell in the Lord, and the Lord, as a person with the Father and the Spirit, dwells in us. A life of such mutual indwelling is a life of coinherence. In the organic union the vine and the branches coinhere; the vine abides in the branches, dispensing life into them, and the branches abide in the vine, receiving the supply of life from the vine. If we see this, we will realize that the proper concept concerning our relationship with Christ is coinherence. Christ lives in us, and we live in Him (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:30).

One Body in Christ

The issue of living this grafted life in the mingled spirit is that we are one Body in Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). Significantly, in Romans 12 Paul speaks of the Body from the perspective of the organic union, that is, from the angle of the life that unites us not only with Christ but also with all the other members of Christ. Therefore, having an organic union with Christ, we are one Body in Christ. *In Christ* points to the fact of being organically one with Christ (v. 5). This union makes us one with Christ and with the members of His Body, revealing that the Body is an organism produced by the union in life that we have with Christ as a result of being grafted into Him (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:27). The Body is held together not by human effort or organization but in and by the organic union with Christ. If we remain in the organic union with Christ by living a life of coinherence in the mingled spirit, we will know, live in, experience, and enjoy the actuality and reality of the organic Body of Christ.

A Corporate Person—the One New Man

In order for there to be the corporate God in the economy of God, there must first be a corporate person, a corporate human being

whom Paul describes as the one new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). Therefore, God's intention in His creation of humankind was to have a corporate man to express Him and to represent Him (Gen. 1:26). God's creation of humanity in Genesis 1 is a picture of the new man in God's new creation; this means that the old creation is a figure, a type, of the new creation. God created humankind in His own image and then gave this corporate person His dominion. In Genesis 1:26 *image* refers to God's positive intention—that man would bear God's image for His expression. *Dominion* in the same verse refers to God's negative intention—that man would have God's dominion to represent Him to deal with His enemy. Because the first man—collectively known as Adam—failed to fulfill God's intention in His creation, Christ the Son of God came as the second man (1 Cor. 15:47), and as such, He expressed God and represented Him. Through His death on the cross, the second man—the personal Christ—created the one new man—the corporate Christ, the church, the Body of Christ (12:12). The church as the one new man and the Body of Christ is the corporate man in God's intention, and this new man will fulfill the twofold purpose of bearing God's image to express Him and of fighting against God's enemy for God's kingdom.

The new man and the Body are synonyms and may be used interchangeably. The emphasis of the church being the Body of Christ is on life; the emphasis of the church being the new man is on the person (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:4; 2:15; 4:24). As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life; as the one new man, the church needs Christ as its person (Col. 3:4; Eph. 3:17). With Christ as both the life and the person, Christ and we, the believers in Christ, form a universal, corporate man. As the One in heaven, Christ is the Head, and as those on earth, we are the Body. Furthermore, following Paul we may say that the one new man as a corporate, universal person is a composition of Christ, the first-born Son of God (Rom. 8:29), and the believers, the many sons of God (Heb. 2:10).

This corporate new man was created through Christ's death on the cross: "Abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new

man, so making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it" (Eph. 2:15-16). Two phrases in verse 15 require close consideration. *In His flesh* Christ terminated all the negative things in the universe, in particular, according to the context, "the middle wall of partition, the enmity" (v. 14). *In Himself* as the sphere, the element, and the essence, Christ created the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man. "Christ is not only the Creator of the one new man, the church, but also the sphere in which and the means by which the one new man was created. He is the very element of the new man, making God's divine nature one entity with humanity" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 15, note 6). Now as believers in Christ, we are one with Him in the organic union to be the universal new man; thus, we all are parts, components, of the corporate one new man in God's economy.

Christ, All and in All

God's goal according to the desire of His heart is to gain the corporate, universal new man constituted with the all-inclusive, preeminent Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2, 8, 16-17; 3:4, 10-11). This new man is actually Christ constituted into us. As the One who indwells us and who is our life, Christ is the constituent of the new man (1:27; 3:4). The more we enjoy Him as our God-allotted portion in the kingdom of the Son of His love (1:12-13), the more He is wrought into us to become the constituent of the new man. Through experiencing and enjoying Christ, we gain Him as the content and constituent of the new man, and the outcome of this experience and enjoyment are the church, the Body of Christ, as the corporate new man.

At this juncture it is crucial for us to see that the church, the Body of Christ, is the universal new man and that in this new man Christ is all and in all. Here we have no place. There is no room for the self or the old man, for in the one new man it is impossible for there to be any natural person. No matter what kind of persons we may be by race, culture, ethnicity, or nationality, in the new man we all are nothing, nobodies. Apparently, many different kinds of persons make up this corporate person; actually, all are parts of the corporate Christ. In fact, in the one new man there is only one person—the all-inclusive, preeminent Christ.

The new man is uniquely one in Christ and with Christ, and the believers as parts of the new man are one in Christ, by Christ, and through Christ (Eph. 2:15). If we were not in Christ—that is, not one spirit with Him in an organic union—we would have no share in the new man but instead would continue to exist in the fallen, divisive old creation. Apart from being in Christ, we could not have been created into the one new man, because in ourselves we do not have and cannot have the element in which and by which the new man is created. Christ and Christ alone is the element, essence, and sphere of the one new man; in Himself He created us into one new man; and it is only by being in Him that we are the universal, corporate man to express God and to represent Him with His authority to bring in His kingdom. Now, in our daily, spiritual experience, we need to be filled, permeated, and saturated with Christ as the life-giving Spirit, allowing Him to make His home in our hearts and to replace us with Himself through an organic, metabolic, transforming process (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The one new man, therefore, is Christ having the preeminence in all the believers and filling them until all natural, racial, cultural, and national distinctions are eliminated, and everyone is constituted with Christ. Then, in the corporate new man, Christ will be all and in all.

For Christ to be all and in all in the one new man means that He is all the members and in all the members. On the one hand, because Christ is the unique constituent of this universal, corporate man, He is all the members; hence, Christ *is* all. On the other hand, we continue to exist as recognizable persons created, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed by the Triune God; hence, Christ is *in* all:

It is true to say that Christ is both in us and that He is us. We are parts of the new man with Christ in us. We continue to exist, but we do not exist without Christ. Rather, we exist as those who are indwelt by Christ. This is what it means to say that in the new man Christ is everyone and that He is also in everyone. It is crucial for us to see that in the new man Christ is everyone and in everyone. In the new man there is nothing but Christ. (Lee, *Conclusion* 2316)

Taking Christ as Our Person

We have pointed out that to the Body Christ is life and to the new man Christ is the person. If we see this, we will be prepared to obey one of the highest requirements placed by God in His economy upon the believers in Christ—the requirement that we take Christ as our person, allowing Him to live in us and to make His home in our hearts (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17). It is significant that after he speaks about the creation of the new man in Christ and before he exhorts us to put on the new man, Paul prays that Christ, the person, would make His home in our hearts. Christ's making His home in us means that He is the person living in us; we have been crucified, and now Christ lives in us. Christ is in all of us, so we all have only one person (Col. 1:27). The new man, as distinguished from the Body, is not about members but about the person (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:14, 18-20, 26). Thus, we need to ask ourselves: Who is my person—I or the Lord Jesus Christ?

In the new man all of the believers in Christ are one corporate person, and the requirement that everyone be only one new man, one corporate person, is extremely high. The essence of this requirement is that for the practical existence of the one new man on earth today, we all need to take Christ as our person. The church is the new man, and this new man needs Christ to be in him as the person. This implies that we, in ourselves, cannot be the person in the new man; here we, the natural person apart from Christ, have no place, for Christ truly is all and in all. Now in our daily living, and especially in the practice of the genuine church life as revealed in the New Testament, we need to reject our old person—the self—and live by our new person—Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). If we care for the inward shifting from the old person to the new person, we will begin to realize that, in the sight of God, the crucial question is not *what* we are doing but *who* is doing it. This requires that we have God's perspective and agree with Him in caring for whether or not we take Christ as our person and live Him (Phil. 1:21).

Christ is our life (Col. 3:4), and Christ is also our person (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17). In our spiritual experience what is first is not taking Christ as our life but taking Christ as our person. The Scriptures are

crystal clear concerning this. The divine life is in Christ, the Son of God (John 1:4; 1 John 5:11-12), and Christ Himself is the divine life (John 11:25; 14:6). Since eternal life—the divine, uncreated, indestructible life of God—is in the Son and cannot be separated from the Son, we cannot have the life without first having the Son. “God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12). If we take Christ as our person, permitting Him to live in us and fill our being with Himself, we will surely have Him as our life. Furthermore, to live by this life, or to live this life, is to live Christ (Phil. 1:21).

If we live our daily life and church life by taking Christ as our person, especially in making decisions, our living will be the living of the one new man (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 17:4; Rom. 15:32; James 4:13-15). Whereas the Body is for moving, the new man is for living, and a central matter in our living is in making decisions (Phil. 1:21-26). If we take Christ as our person, we will not decide anything in our personal life or church life by ourselves (Philem. 14); rather, we will make all decisions by Christ as our person. The living of the one new man requires such an exercise and denial of the self. Because the living of the one new man is a corporate living, our decisions are corporate decisions and not simply our personal, or individualistic, decisions. Since we are part of the corporate new man, our decisions and our living should not be ours alone; they should be the decisions and living of the corporate new man. In the new man and for the new man, we all take Christ as our person to make plans and to decide how we should live (Rom. 15:32).

As a particular expression of His mercy toward us, the Lord made the apostle Paul a pattern of taking Christ as our person for the one new man (1 Tim. 1:16). Concerning this, Paul had a number of vitally important things to say:

- “It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:15-16). Nothing brings more pleasure to God than unveiling the living person of the Son of God, and we, by the Lord’s grace, need to be brought into a state where we are filled with the

revelation of the Son of God and spontaneously give Him the ground to live in us and even to become us.

- “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (2:20). Paul did not say that the life of Christ lived in him but that Christ, the person, lived in him. This is in keeping with God’s economy, according to which the “I” is crucified with Christ in His death, and Christ lives in us in His resurrection.
- “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (3:27). To be baptized into Christ is to be immersed into the reality of the person of Christ. It is also to be clothed with the pneumatic Christ, with the result that He is both our inward constituent and our outward expression in our living.
- “My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). When we reach the condition of having Christ formed in us, we will have Christ fully grown in us. Christ has been born into us, He is living in us, and eventually, at our maturity, He will be formed in us.
- “That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17). According to Ephesians 3:16, God the Father is strengthening us through God the Spirit into the inner man so that God the Son may make His home in every part of our heart. If we allow Christ to have all the room within us and if we give Him the freedom to do whatever He wants in us, our heart will become His home.
- “God is my witness how I long after you all in the inward parts of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:8). This indicates that Paul did not live in his natural inner being but in the inward parts of Christ. He experienced Christ in His inward parts and was one with Him in His inward parts. Instead of retaining his own inward parts for himself, he took Christ’s inward parts as his, and as a result, Paul’s inner being was reconstituted with the inward parts of Christ.

- “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5). If we would let Christ’s mind be in us, as Paul did, we need to take Christ as our person by denying our natural mind and taking His mind (Matt. 16:22-25). In order to take Christ as our person for the corporate new man, we must be willing to deny our natural mind and then allow the mind of Christ to replace our mind.
- “What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, it is for your sake in the person of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:10). As one who took Christ as his person and life and who lived Christ, Paul lived in close, intimate fellowship with the Lord, doing everything according to Christ. Even in the matter of forgiving a brother, Paul did not act on his own, relying on his subjective view and feeling. On the contrary, Paul took Christ as his person and was one with Him in the mingled spirit. Therefore, when Paul forgave a brother, he acted in the person of Christ.
- “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit” (Rom. 8:4). The Christ who dwells in us is the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. Since the Lord is the Spirit and the Spirit is one with our regenerated spirit, in practicality to take Christ as our person is to live, walk, and have our being according to the mingled spirit.³ No longer should we walk according to the vanity of the mind (Eph. 4:17-18), acting according to the diverse impulses and notions of our fallen nature, but we should walk according to the spirit and in so doing take Christ as our person for the universal, corporate one new man.

Being Renewed

Christ created the one new man on the cross, but the believers, as parts of this corporate person, need to participate in this creation through renewing (Eph. 2:15-16; 4:22-24). Whereas Ephesians 2:15 says that the new man was created, Colossians 3:10 says that the new man is being renewed. Because the new man was created with

us, who belong to the old creation, he needs to be renewed. To be renewed is to have God's element added into our being to replace and discharge our old element. God is forever new; actually, newness is God Himself.⁴ He infuses His ever-new essence into us to renew our entire tripartite being—spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). In addition, the Spirit of God renews us by infusing our inward parts with God's attributes, which are forever new and unchanging. While this inward process is taking place, God arranges our environment ("all things"—Rom. 8:28) so that gradually, daily, our outer man will be consumed and our inner man will be renewed (2 Cor. 4:16). On the one hand, we are being consumed; on the other hand, the renewing Spirit imparts the element of the corporate new man into our being to make us a new creation (Titus 3:5). The more we experience this, the more we will walk in the newness of the divine life in resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

As indicated by the phrase *unto full knowledge* (Col. 3:10), this renewing takes place mainly in our mind (Rom. 12:2). According to Ephesians 4:23, a verse that is vital and crucial to us, the key to putting off the old man (the old corporate life) and putting on the new man (the new corporate life) is in being renewed in the spirit of our mind. The spirit of the mind is the regenerated spirit, as a renewed spirit, mingled with the life-giving Spirit, as the renewing Spirit, becoming the mingled spirit that spreads into our mind. Hence, the two spirits—the Spirit of God and the spirit of man—combine to form the spirit of the mind. When the life-giving Spirit, who dwells in and is mingled with our regenerated spirit, spreads into our mind, this mingled spirit becomes the spirit of the mind. It is through this mingled spirit that our mind is saturated with the element of God, and thus it is by this mingled spirit that our mind is renewed.

It may be profitable to view this from a different angle. Because we are in Christ, experiencing an organic union with Him, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). When the divine Spirit with the divine life was added into our being at the time of regeneration, a new creation took place in our spirit. This produced a new being, a new man, and we became, intrinsically, part of the universal, corporate man. The regeneration of our spirit was actually the creation of the

new man within us, and with this fact as the basis, we may be assured that in our spirit the new man has already been created. However, our soul and body remain in the old creation and thus do not yet participate in the life of the new man. Although our spirit has been regenerated and thereby renewed to become a renewed spirit, our soul with its faculties of mind, emotion, and will remains in the old creation and still needs to be renewed. Apart from the renewing of the mind by the spirit of the mind, there is no way for the corporate new man to be real and practical to us in our Christian life and church life.

The renewing of the mind is inward, intrinsic, and organic—a process in the divine life that transforms our soul (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The renewing in the spirit of our mind revolutionizes our thinking and reasoning, delivering us from the natural mind with its biases, distortions, and misconceptions and radically adjusting our view of God, humanity, the universe, and the meaning of human existence. Through such a renewing, the mind of Christ gradually becomes our mind (1 Cor. 2:16). Day by day, our minds are being renewed through the realization that Christ as the life-giving Spirit is mingled with our regenerated human spirit.⁵

The renewal of the mind is for the reality and practicality of the one new man on earth today so that God's eternal economy may be carried out. Our mind needs to be renewed not only for our spiritual growth or our personal behavior but mainly for the existence of the one new man. It is a tragedy of inestimable proportions that millions of believers have become the new man in their spirit but remain the old man in their soul, especially in their mind. Because of this deplorable situation, in a very real sense the corporate new man has no reality or practical existence today. Instead, believers gather together in the old man according to the racial, cultural, and natural distinctions of the old man, contradicting the divine fact that in the new man these distinctions have been nullified and that Christ is truly all and in all. Hence, the focal point of our being renewed in the spirit of our mind is the one new man. Throughout our entire life, the racial and national mind has been built up, but for the existence of the corporate new man, this mind must be renewed. The greatest hindrance to the

reality and practicality of the new man is our unrenewed mind, a mind saturated with our cultural background, a mind of vanity, enmity, and divisiveness. If the new man is to come into full, practical existence, we need to experience a thorough renewal of our mind. Otherwise, the “balkanization” among the believers will be irreversible, and there will be no testimony of the one new man. This is a matter of intense spiritual warfare, as high things in the natural mind of countless believers rise up against the full knowledge of God. Therefore, it is crucial for believers to realize that the only way the corporate new man can exist in a practical way is by our mind being renewed.

A Corporate God-man

The more our mind is renewed, the more we will realize that the one new man, the corporate man in God’s economy, is a corporate God-man. In Christ, God and man became one entity, the God-man (Luke 1:35; John 1:14; Matt. 1:18, 20-23). Because the Lord Jesus was conceived of the divine essence and born of the human essence, He was born a God-man. Hence, for His being as the God-man, He had two essences—the human essence and the divine essence. The New Testament record related to His conception makes this clear. The conception of the Holy Spirit in a human virgin constituted a mingling of the divine nature with the human nature, producing the God-man, the One who is both the complete God and a perfect man (Luke 1:35). As the complete God and perfect man, the God-man Jesus Christ has the human nature with its virtues to contain God and express Him with the divine attributes.⁶

The Gospel of Luke is a revelation of this God-man who lived a human life filled with the divine life as the content (1:35; 2:7-16, 40, 49, 52). Through incarnation He brought the infinite God into the finite man (Col. 2:9). As the God-man, Christ, in His unique person, was the mingling of divinity with humanity, and in Him we see both the divine attributes and the human virtues. The make-up of His being, His constitution, is a composition of the divine nature with its divine attributes and the human nature with its human virtues. Therefore, in Christ the divine attributes were

mingled with the human virtues, and His human living was the living of a man who lived God to manifest divinity in humanity, to express the divine attributes in the human virtues.

The New Testament reveals the marvelous fact that Christ, the first God-man, has become the many God-men (Rom. 1:4; 8:29). The Lord Jesus, the first God-man, is the prototype for the producing of the many God-men (1 Pet. 2:21); thus, the many God-men are His reproduction. According to John 12:24, the Lord Jesus, the God-man, was a grain of wheat that fell into the ground in order to produce many grains as His reproduction. The first grain—the first God-man—was the prototype, and the many grains—the many God-men—produced by this one grain through death and resurrection are the reproduction of the first God-man.⁷

We need to be enlightened to see that as believers in Christ, brothers of Christ, and children of God, we are God-men, born of God, possessing the life and nature of God, and belonging to the species of God (1:12-13). As children of God, we are God-men, for we are the same in life and nature as the One of whom we were born (1 John 3:1; 5:1). Because we have been born of the divine life, we are divine persons with the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). If, based upon the divine revelation, we view ourselves in this way, our daily experience will be revolutionized.

The one new man, the universal, corporate man in God's economy, is the corporate God-man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11), for this corporate person is the composition and the totality of Christ, the first God-man, and the believers in Christ as the many God-men. The first God-man, the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18), is the Head of this corporate man (2:19), and the many God-men are the many sons of God (Heb. 2:10). The God-men, as the regenerated children of God, constitute the one new man (Eph. 5:1; 4:24). From this we see that the one new man is a corporate man and that this corporate man is an aggregate of all the God-men. Through His death and resurrection Christ produced many brothers (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11) who, with Him, have become the universal one new man—the corporate God-man.

For the one new man as the corporate God-man, we need to live the life of a God-man (Phil. 1:19-21; 3:10). Christ's human living was as a man living God to express the divine attributes in the human virtues. When He was on earth, though He was a genuine man, He lived by God (John 6:57; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 7:16-17). He lived God and expressed God in everything. Whatever He did was God's doing from within Him and through Him. As the reproduction and the continuation of Christ as the first God-man, we should live the same kind of life (1 John 2:6). The Lord's God-man living established a model for our God-man living; this is the pattern of being crucified to live so that God may be expressed in humanity (Gal. 2:20). To follow this model requires that we deny ourselves, be conformed to Christ's death, and magnify Him by the bountiful supply of His Spirit (Matt. 16:24; Phil. 3:10; 1:19-21). We can live this kind of life because the first God-man is now the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit, dwelling within us. It is imperative for us to see that the One who lived the life of a God-man is now the Spirit living in us and through us (2 Cor. 3:17; 13:5; Eph. 3:16-19). Now we should simply take Him as our person, walk according to the mingled spirit, and live Him for His corporate expression.⁸

Deified to Become God in Life and Nature

In order to become the corporate God in the economy of God, this corporate God-man, who is one with the Triune God in the mingled spirit, must become God, not in the Godhead or as an object of worship but in life, nature, constitution, appearance, and expression.⁹ The universal, corporate man, having been deified, is the corporate God.

A Definition of Deification

God's economy is God's plan and arrangement to dispense Himself into tripartite human beings to make them His eternal, corporate expression, the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem. The outworking of such an economy implies that in Christ God must become man so that in Christ man might become God in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression but not in the Godhead and not as an object of worship. We become God in the sense of being born of God through regeneration and then

being saturated and permeated with God until we are wholly sanctified, transformed, and conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God. This process of becoming God neither effaces our humanity nor negates our status as creatures. As God's redeemed and glorified people, we will remain creatures and humans for eternity. In deification we will never be exalted to become part of the Godhead or share God's incommunicable attributes, such as self-existence and omnipotence. This understanding of our becoming God in the economy of God is balanced, for it sets forth the full extent of our participation in God's divinity and also limits the degree of that participation even as it maintains the eternal distinction between the Triune God and His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people. We are becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship.

In the Organic Union

We become God not in ourselves but only in the organic union with Christ, where eternally we will live a life of absolute dependence on Him for our existence. "The believer has an organic union with Christ through believing into Him. To believe into Christ is to have our being merged into His that we two may be one organically" (Recovery Version, Phil. 1:29, note 1). The Lord is God by nature, but we become God only by grace, by being joined to Him, and by constant enjoyment of the divine life and perpetual participation in the divine nature. In ourselves we are nothing, we have nothing, and we can do nothing. Only through the organic union can we be what God is, for in this union the divine life is constantly flowing into us, supplying us, and sustaining us.

Deification and Regeneration

Deification is predicated upon regeneration, and regeneration, when properly understood, implies, even necessitates, deification. The believers in Christ become God through regeneration. The analogy with human birth is both illustrative and instructive. How did we become human beings? The answer, of course, is by birth. We were generated by our human parents to become the same as our parents—human—in their life and nature but not in their person or parenthood. We were born, generated, to be human in life and in

nature. The principle is the same with our becoming God through regeneration. We were born, regenerated, to be divine in life and in nature. “By our first birth we became man; by our second birth we become God” (Lee, *Issue* 65). We were regenerated of our Father to be the same as He—divine—in life and in nature but not in His person or fatherhood.

The Bible clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically speaks of the believers being born of God. We have “become children of God...begotten... of God” (John 1:12-13). Does this not refer to an actual becoming by means of an actual begetting? If not, then to what does it refer? It certainly does not refer to adoption. Just as we were begotten of our human father to be human children with a human life and nature, so we were begotten of our divine Father to be divine children with a divine life and nature (in addition to our human life and nature, which we retain after regeneration). The point here—and it cannot be overemphasized—is that we have truly been begotten of God to be His real, actual, genuine children possessing His life and nature. We are called children of God because we are children of God.

Deification begins with and, in our spiritual experience, is based upon regeneration. We have been born of God, and therefore we are God in life and nature. We affirm deification through regeneration and deification based upon regeneration. Those who deny deification must also deny regeneration. Whereas some deny both, we declare both. We, the regenerated children of God, are God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Through regenerating us, God does not forfeit His unique Godhead; by being regenerated, we do not attain the Godhead. Through regeneration we are God without the Godhead and without the attributes that forever belong to Him alone.

Illustrations from the Gospel of John

To this truth the Gospel of John gives abundant testimony.

Children of God

The believers in Christ are children of God. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God,

to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). This word is echoed in 1 John 3:1-2: “Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are...Beloved, now we are children of God.” According to the Scriptures, we become children of God only by being born, begotten, of God to have the life and nature of God. It is a serious and grievous departure from the truth to deny this fact.

When our spirit was born of the Spirit through the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23), we were born, begotten, of God to become children of God, and now the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). As the Father’s children, we have the Father’s life, which is eternal, and we have the Father’s nature, which is divine. However, we do not have His fatherhood. Because we are children of God, we are the same as the begetting God in life and in nature. Human children have the life and nature of their parents, and the children of God have the life and nature of their Father. The only way to avoid this obvious truth is to deny the reality of regeneration.

To believe that we have been born of God to be children of God is to believe that, in a certain restricted sense, we have become God. As children of God, we are God-men, born of God, possessing the life and nature of God, and belonging to the species of God (Eph. 5:1; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1). God is our real, genuine Father, and we are His real, genuine children. No doubt, the greatest wonder in the universe is that we, fallen human beings, could be begotten of God to become children of God. Now that we have been born of the divine life and possess the divine life, we, the children of God, are divine persons. We have not only the divine life but also the divine nature; therefore, in Christ we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Brothers of Christ

The children of God are the brothers of Christ. This is another result of regeneration, the divine birth. Consider the Lord’s word

in John 20:17: “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” From God’s point of view, we were regenerated through the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), a point that is relevant here because we are attending to the speaking of Christ on the day of His resurrection. In resurrection He could for the first time call the disciples *brothers* and refer to His Father as their Father:

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. (Lee, Recovery Version, John 20:17, note 2)

The many brothers of the Firstborn are the same as He is in life and nature. Through incarnation, He, who was divine, became human, and through resurrection we, who are human, became divine. This truth, which implies deification, is the clear revelation in Hebrews 2:11: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers.” The Firstborn among many brothers was born of God in His humanity in His resurrection (Rom. 1:3-4; Acts 13:33), and the many sons, His many brothers, were also born in His resurrection. This is the basis for the expression

are all of One. Christ and His many brothers are of the same source. “Both the firstborn Son and the many sons of God are born of the same Father God in resurrection (Acts 13:33; 1 Pet. 1:3) and have the same divine life and nature. Hence, He is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Lee, Recovery Version, Heb. 2:11, note 1). This indicates deification—the process of becoming God in life and in nature, which begins with regeneration through resurrection. We are actual brothers of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, having the same Father (“My Father and your Father”) and the same life and nature. He is divine and human; we are human and divine.

Sons of Light

In John 8:12 the Lord Jesus said, “I am the light of the world,” and in 12:36 He went on to say, “While you have the light, believe into the light, so that you may become sons of light.” Matthew 5:14 says, “You are the light of the world,” and Ephesians 5:8 declares, “You were once darkness but are now light in the Lord.” These verses indicate that, in a very real and wonderful sense, in Christ we have become what God is as light. Having been born of God, who is light, we also are light. Of course, we are not light in ourselves—we are light in the Lord. This implies deification.

Many Grains

The believers in Christ, as children of God, brothers of Christ, and sons of light, are also the many grains. “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Through His incarnation Christ became a grain of wheat, with the shell of His humanity concealing His divinity. The Gospel of John reveals that Christ died not only as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world and as the fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent to judge the ruler of this age and to destroy the devil, but also as the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to release the divine life. This is Christ in His life-releasing death. Who was this grain of wheat in 12:24? It was the Word who became flesh in 1:14, that is, God incarnate, the God-man. This God-man, as a grain of wheat, died on the cross to release the divine life, signified by the water that flowed out from His pierced side (19:34), in order to

have a reproduction of Himself in the “much fruit,” the many grains who, after they have been broken, blended, and baked in fulfillment of the type of the meal offering, form the one loaf, which signifies the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17).

The central matter here is that the many grains are the reproduction, increase, and multiplication of the one grain, the God-man. The many grains in John 12:24 are the brothers in 20:17, both of which were brought forth in resurrection. This is nothing less than the reproduction of God, the increase, multiplication, and enlargement of God not in His Godhead (which is impossible) for His economy. It cannot reasonably be denied that the many grains are the same in life and in nature as the one grain. The one grain is the Son of God; the many grains are the sons of God. We hasten to add, however, that this reproduction of the one grain by no means imperils the Godhead of the one grain, for this cannot be communicated to the many grains.

Branches of the True Vine

The grains in 12:24 are the branches in 15:5. In verse 1 the Lord Jesus unequivocally declares, “I am the true vine.” “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” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, note 1). Christ with the believers, the vine with the branches, is a single organism in God’s economy. Actually, the true vine is the divine economy, and it signifies the spreading of Christ, the extension of God in Christ not in the Godhead but in the economy of God. As the vine, Christ is growing. In Himself as the eternal, infinite God, Christ does not need to grow, cannot grow, and does not in fact grow. But in God’s economy this vine must grow. The thought here is similar to that in Colossians 2:19, which speaks of the Body of Christ growing with the growth of God. God grows not in Himself but in the Body, causing the growth of the Body. In like manner, Christ does not grow, spread, and increase in Himself, but He does grow, spread, and increase in the vine, in the organism in the divine economy. In particular, the vine grows in and through the branches, which are indisputably the extensions of the vine and thus must be the same as the vine in life and in nature.

If we see the significance of being branches in the vine, we will see that the vine with the branches in John 15 implies deification. To be a branch signifies that Christ is our life. The branch has no life in itself; rather, the life of the vine is the life in the branch. This life is the divine, eternal, uncreated life received through regeneration. To be a branch also signifies that we are parts of Christ in the organic union with Him. Since Christ is the vine, the branches—as parts of the vine—are parts of Christ. We not only have Christ in us as our life, but we are in Him and thus are parts of Him. Moreover, for us to be branches means that Christ is being wrought into us (Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17). Having Christ as our life, being parts of Christ, and having Christ wrought into us—all these imply deification. Apart from being born of God to have His life and nature, we cannot have Christ as our life or be parts of Christ or have Christ wrought into us. The branches of the vine, therefore, are the deified believers in Christ. To be a branch is to be God—not in His deity but in His life and nature. Once again, this is a matter of regeneration and the tremendous difference it makes in the lives of believers. Because we have been born of God, we have the life and nature of God, and in this sense we are God.

The Bride

Ultimately the believers in Christ will be the bride of Christ, a corporate Shulammitte as portrayed in Song of Songs. If we read John 3 carefully, we will realize that regeneration is for the bride of Christ. We have been born of the Spirit in our spirit, receiving eternal life, so that we may enter into the kingdom of God and become the bride of Christ, His increase. “He who has the bride is the bridegroom...He must increase” (vv. 29-30). The bride of Christ in verse 29 is the increase of Christ in verse 30. This indicates that if Christ is to have a bride prepared for His eternal marriage, He must increase by dispensing Himself into His chosen and redeemed people, regenerating them to become parts of His bride as His increase in life and nature. The bride is a living composition of regenerated persons, of those who have been born of God to receive the life of God. This requires that the believers, as the components of the bride, become God in life and nature. Once again, the Gospel of John testifies of our deification in Christ.

The type of Eve in Genesis 2 reveals that Christ, typified by Adam, cannot join Himself to someone who is not bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. His wife must be the same as He is in every possible way short of the Godhead. This is reasonable and logical; it is also necessary. If Christ were to join Himself to one dissimilar to Himself, that would be an improper and strange union. Adam could not be joined to anything other than his counterpart. In like manner, Christ cannot be joined to those who are simply human and do not have the divine life and nature. Christ is divine and human, and His wife must also be divine and human; then the two, Christ and His counterpart, being the same in life and in nature, can be joined and enjoy a blissful married life for eternity. This requires that His wife, a composition of believers, become God in life and in nature. Christ is God becoming man to be our Husband, and we are men becoming God to be His wife. This is the story of a loving, personal, and intimate process through which we, the believers, become God for the bride of Christ.

Becoming God through God's Complete Salvation

The believers in Christ become God through organic salvation. By *organic salvation* we mean salvation in the divine life, as revealed in Romans 5:10: "If we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." This word indicates that the complete salvation of God has two aspects—the judicial aspect and the organic aspect. The judicial aspect, which is according to the righteousness of God and which fulfills the righteous requirements of His law for sinners, is for sinners to be forgiven (Luke 24:47), washed (Heb. 1:3), justified (Rom. 3:24-25), reconciled to God (5:10), and sanctified positionally (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 13:12). The judicial aspect is focused on redemption. The organic aspect is through the life of God and accomplishes God's purpose in the believers according to His eternal intention and heart's desire. The organic aspect is focused on life. Concerning both aspects, Romans 5:10 is pivotal:

Verse 10 of this chapter points out that God's full salvation revealed in this book consists of two sections: one section is the redemption accomplished for us by Christ's death, and the other section is the saving afforded us by

Christ's life. The first four chapters of this book discourse comprehensively regarding the redemption accomplished by Christ's death, whereas the last twelve chapters speak in detail concerning the saving afforded by Christ's life. Before 5:11, Paul shows us that we are saved because we have been redeemed, justified, and reconciled to God. However, we have not yet been saved to the extent of being sanctified, transformed, and conformed to the image of God's Son. Redemption, justification, and reconciliation, which are accomplished outside of us by the death of Christ, redeem us objectively; sanctification, transformation, and conformation, which are accomplished within us by the working of Christ's life, save us subjectively. Objective redemption redeems us positionally from condemnation and eternal punishment; subjective salvation saves us dispositionally from our old man, our self, and our natural life. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 10, note 2)

Regeneration is the beginning, the initial step, in God's organic salvation, to be followed, if we are normal in our spiritual experience, by sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. To be sanctified is to be saturated with the holy nature of God until we are holy in our constitution and disposition. Since God alone is holy, to become holy is to become God. To be renewed is to have the old element discharged from our soul and replaced by a new element—the element of the divine newness (Rev. 21:5). Since God Himself is newness, to become renewed, or to be renewed, is to become God. Renewing is accompanied by transformation. To be transformed is to be changed into the likeness of Christ, that is, to have the image of the glorified and resurrected Christ formed within us. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory by beholding the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face. As the Lord's glorious element is infused into us, we undergo a divine metabolism and are transformed into the reality of the Lord's image. Conformation saves us from our natural self-expression. To be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God, the divine-human Christ in His resurrection, is to be the mass reproduction

of Christ, the first God-man, as the prototype for our becoming His many brothers fully like Him not only in life and nature but also in expression. To be glorified has both an objective and a subjective dimension. Objectively, to be glorified is to be brought into the realm of glory; subjectively, to be glorified is to be permeated with Christ as the indwelling glory (Col. 1:27) to such an extent that He bursts forth from within us in glorious manifestation, comparable to the blossoming of a carnation seed.

The process of becoming God through God's organic salvation is a process by which we advance from regeneration to glorification via sanctification, renewing, transformation, and conformation. All six steps involve the addition of God into our being, the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity into our spirit, our soul, and, eventually, our body. This is a subjective and experiential matter in which God actually increases within us as we grow with the growth of God (2:19). Those who reject deification as a heresy or dismiss it as a dangerous, heterodox notion will in all likelihood deny the organic aspect of salvation and find their solace in only one aspect, the objective aspect, of the complete salvation of God. Theologians and preachers who are unbalanced in this way hinder both themselves and others from progressing in the experience of God's salvation. By contrast, those believers who treasure equally both aspects of salvation stand firmly on the solid rock of justification by grace through faith in Christ and His redemptive work and simultaneously and continuously experience and enjoy the "much more" of Romans 5:10—the subjective salvation in the divine life. By this subjective salvation, which is established upon objective redemption, the believers are made God in life and nature.

Deification and God's Goal in His Economy

Deification is related intrinsically to God's goal in His economy—to have a corporate expression of Himself, initially in the Body of Christ and consummately in the New Jerusalem. Since we can express only what we are, in order to express God, we must become God in the restricted way described here. We cannot be the expression of God—actually, God in His expression, God expressed—unless we first become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Therefore, we are becoming God for the corporate expression of God. This

was God's intention when He formed His purpose in Christ in eternity past, and this will be God's satisfaction when He enjoys the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose in eternity future.

Ephesians 1:4 and 5 unveil God's eternal intention: "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." God's good pleasure is, in Christ, to make Himself one with His chosen people and, in Christ, to make them the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead (v. 9). Our being holy (v. 4) and our being sons (v. 5) are both related to God's good pleasure. God chose us to be holy. Since only God is holy (holiness is His nature), to be holy is to be God, the same as God in His nature of holiness. This is deification. The sons of God are not merely adopted by Him in a formal, legal sense—they are born of God and constituted with God to express God with His glory. This also is deification. Those chosen to be holy and predestinated to be sons eventually become members of the Body of Christ, "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (v. 23).

Eventually, the Body of Christ will consummate in the New Jerusalem, the consummate, corporate, eternal expression of God in the new heaven and the new earth. As the ultimate corporate person in God's economy, the New Jerusalem is a composition of divinity and humanity mingled and built up together as one entity (Rev. 21:2, 10-11). This glorious corporate entity involves God becoming man and man becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Apart from our becoming God in the organic union with Christ through God's organic salvation, the New Jerusalem could not exist. The New Jerusalem is a composition of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified people who have been deified (John 3:6; Heb. 2:11; Rom. 12:2; 8:29-30). Thus, we are being deified for the New Jerusalem. For us to be deified means that we are being constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God so that we may be made God in life and nature to be His corporate expression for eternity. This is the corporate God.

Three aspects of the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures converge and consummate with the corporate God in the economy of God. God has made Himself one with His chosen people and has brought them into union with Himself in Christ. Christ has created in Himself the one new man, a corporate God-man constituted with Himself, that lives as He lived on earth a life in the divine reality for God's expression. This universal, corporate man in union with God and thus one with Him is now passing through a process in God's salvation to become God in life, nature, constitution, appearance, and expression. The totality of all this is the corporate God manifested, according to the Bible, as the vine, the Body of Christ, and the New Jerusalem.

The Corporate God as the Universal Vine

Prerequisites to gaining a spiritual understanding of the vine in John 15 as the corporate God are knowing the basic thought in the Gospel of John and seeing the revelation, presented in this Gospel, of the universal, divine-human incorporation.

The basic thought of the Gospel of John concerns Christ's coming to us in His incarnation and His going to God the Father through death and resurrection in order to bring us into God for the producing and building up of the Father's house, which is a mutual dwelling place for the Triune God and His redeemed, regenerated people. This Gospel reveals how God comes into man and brings man into God. By His coming through incarnation, Christ brought the Triune God into humanity, and then He lived on earth as a man, living the divine life in the human life for the expression of the Father. By His going through death and resurrection, He brought man into God, and in so doing, He caused the believers to be one with God and enabled them to live in God. In brief, this Gospel shows us that the Triune God in Christ comes into man and brings man in Christ into God for God's eternal building, signified by the Father's house.

This basic thought is woven into the structure of the Gospel of John with its two main sections. The first section consists of chapters 1 through 12, and the second section, of chapters 14 through 21.

(Chapter 13 is the turning point between the two sections.) The first section reveals that Christ the Son came from the Father and with the Father through incarnation to bring God into us; the second section reveals that Christ went to the Father through death and resurrection to bring us into God. The result of this coming and going is a spiritual, divine-human building, the Father's house (and also the Son's vine) as the corporate expression of the Triune God in redeemed humanity.

This building is what we may call the universal, divine-human incorporation, a corporate organic entity composed of persons living in a relationship of coinherence, of mutual indwelling.¹⁰ God in His Divine Trinity is an incorporation, for the Father, the Son, and the Spirit mutually coinhere and work together as one (14:10-11). This is the divine incorporation. When the Lord Jesus was glorified in His resurrection, the divine incorporation was enlarged to include all the believers in Christ, who have entered into an organic union with Him and who are mingled with Him. This is the profound revelation in John 14:20: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." What we have here is not simply the Divine Trinity as the divine incorporation but also the processed and consummated Triune God united, mingled, and incorporated with the believers to become the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation. As the Gospel of John reveals, this divine-human incorporation exists in three aspects: the Father's house for His rest, satisfaction, and manifestation (v. 2), the Son's vine for God's expansion and glorification (15:1-8, 16), and the Spirit's child (16:21), the new man, to carry out God's eternal economy.

The true vine with its branches—Christ the Son with the believers in the Son—is the organism of the Triune God in the divine economy to grow with His riches and express His life. The Triune God now has an organism in the Son for His multiplication, enlargement, and glorification. The Father as the husbandman is the founder; the Son is the center, the embodiment, the manifestation; the Spirit is the reality; and the branches are the Body, the corporate expression (15:1, 4-5, 26). All that the Father is and has is embodied in Christ the Son and then realized in the Spirit as the reality.

All that the Spirit has received from the Son is wrought into us, the branches, to be expressed, testified, and manifested through us. This vine, this organism, is the Triune God united, mingled, and incorporated with His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit coinhere mutually with the believers, because the Triune God and the believers have been united, mingled, and incorporated into one enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation.

Like the Father's house and the Spirit's child, the vine as such an incorporation is actually the corporate God. Here we see God making Himself one with His redeemed, regenerated people and causing them to be one with Him in the organic union experienced in the mingled spirit. Here we see a corporate entity, a universal person, corresponding to the one new man in Ephesians and Colossians and taking Christ as life, person, and constituent. Here we also see deification, for, as we pointed out earlier, the branches, as parts of the vine, are the same as Christ the vine in life and in nature. This is the corporate God in the economy of God.

The Corporate God as the Body of Christ

The most profound revelation of the Body of Christ is found in the book of Ephesians, where we see that the Body is the issue of the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity, the product of God in Christ building Himself into our inner being and the constitution resulting from the mingling of the Triune God with the tripartite man.

Every chapter of Ephesians is structured with the Divine Trinity as its basic element. Furthermore, since the Body of Christ comes into being by the dispensing of the Divine Trinity into the believers, each chapter of Ephesians speaks of the divine dispensing. Chapter 1 unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated us in eternity, God the Son redeemed us, and God the Spirit sealed us as a pledge, thus imparting Himself into us for the producing of the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Chapter 2 shows that in the Divine Trinity all the believers have access unto God the Father through God the Son, in God the Spirit. In chapter 3 Paul prays that God the Father will strengthen

us through the Spirit into the inner man so that Christ, God the Son, may make His home in our hearts. Chapter 4 portrays how the processed Triune God as the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father is mingled with the Body of Christ, with all the members experiencing the Divine Trinity in the divine dispensing. Chapter 5 exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit and to give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Chapter 6 instructs us to fight the spiritual warfare by being empowered in the Lord, God the Son, putting on the whole armor of God the Father, and wielding the sword of the Spirit. As we read Ephesians in this light, we should be deeply impressed with the fact that the issue and goal of the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity is the Body of Christ (1:22-23; 3:6, 19-21; 4:4-6, 16; 5:23, 30).

In Ephesians 3:14-21 this dispensing is the building of the Triune God into our being so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. Concerning this, Paul prayed, "That He [the Father] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith" (vv. 16-17). Since our heart is the totality of our inward parts, the center of our inward being, and our representative with regard to our inclination, affection, delight, and desire, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, He controls our entire inward being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself. The more Christ spreads within us, the more He settles down in us and makes His home in us, occupying every part of our inner being, possessing all these parts, and saturating them with Himself. As He spreads into our hearts in this way, He becomes not only our life but also our person. We need to agree with God regarding this and cooperate with the Lord by opening our entire being to Him. Then by taking Christ as our person and allowing Him to spread into our hearts, the person living in our hearts will no longer be the self but Christ.

When Christ, who is unlimited and immeasurable (v. 18), makes His home in our hearts, we will be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). The fullness of God is the Body of Christ as the expression of the Triune God to the uttermost, the ultimate

consummation of the corporate expression of the Triune God. This indicates that the Body of Christ is the unlimited expression of the unlimited Christ. In order to have the reality of the Body of Christ, we must allow Christ to make His home in our hearts. If we let Christ do this, fully opening to Him as the Spirit in our spirit (the inner man), we will be filled with the Triune God to such an extent that we will become His full expression. Then, in practicality, we will have the genuine church life—the church life that is the issue of the unlimited and immeasurable Christ personally making His home in our hearts. In order for the Lord’s word in Matthew 16:18 concerning the building up of the church to be fulfilled, the church needs to enter into a state where many of the believers allow Christ to make His home in their hearts, possessing, occupying, and saturating their entire inner being. The more Christ occupies our inner being, the more the Body of Christ will be built up (Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16).

Based upon the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity and the central work of God in Christ as the Spirit to build Himself into our being, we will have the Body of Christ as a divine-human constitution revealed in chapter 4. “The essential, crystallized significance of the Body of Christ is that the Triune God is constituted with His chosen and redeemed people to become a constitution, a constituted entity” (Lee, *Governing* 28). According to 4:4-6 the intrinsic constitution of the Body of Christ is the union, the mingling, and the incorporation of the processed and consummated Triune God with His tripartite people. Hence, the Triune God and we are mingled into a constitution, and this constitution is a single, organic entity—the Body of Christ.

This divine-human constitution has an outward framework and an inward element. The believers in Christ, who are redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, and transformed by God, are the outward framework, and the processed and consummated Triune God is the inward source, element, and substance. The Father is the source of the inward element (v. 6), the Son is the inward element itself (v. 5), and the Spirit is the essence of the inward element (v. 4). All three of the Divine Trinity are dispensed, worked into, and mingled with the redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed,

and transformed believers, with the result that they are constituted into the organic Body of Christ, an entity that is divine yet human and human yet divine. The four—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the believers as a corporate man—are blended, incorporated, and built up together to become the Body of Christ, the corporate God.

In the economy of God, the Body of Christ is the “four-in-one God,” a constitution produced by the union, mingling, and incorporation of the processed God with the deified man. “Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we may say that the Triune God is now the ‘four-in-one God.’ These four are the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body” (Lee, *Deeper* 195). Clearly, Ephesians 4:4-6 reveals four persons—the Spirit, the Lord, God the Father, and the one Body—mingled together as one entity to be the Body of Christ. Thus, in the economy of God, the Triune God and the Body are four-in-one:

Ephesians 4:4-6 speaks of one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father. In the Body the Spirit is the essence. The essence needs the element, which is the Lord Christ. The element must have an origin, a source, which is the Father. The Father is the source, the origin. Out of the Father there is the element, and within the element there is the essence. God is the origin, the Son is the element, the Spirit is the essence, and the Body is the very constitution. These are four-in-one. However, only the first three are worthy of our worship; the fourth, the Body, should not be deified as an object of worship. (Lee, *Central* 127-128).

To be sure, the Body is not deified to be worshipped along with the three of the Triune God. Nevertheless, the existence of the Body as revealed in the New Testament depends upon deification, that is, the believers in Christ becoming God in life, nature, constitution, appearance, and expression but not in the Godhead. It is only by God’s becoming man to make man God that the Body of Christ can be produced. God is making us, His children, the same as He is in life and in nature so that He might produce and build up the

Body of Christ. God sent His Son to be a man and to live a God-man life by the divine life. The issue of the Lord's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection is a universal man that is exactly the same as He is—a corporate God-man living a God-man life by the divine life (Rom. 8:3-4; 12:4-5). Through regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification, we are becoming God for the Body of Christ. The believers, the human part of this divine-human constitution, are one with the Lord; they are a corporate person, and they are God in life and in nature. Thus, in Christ and mingled with the processed and consummated Triune God, they become the corporate God in the economy of God.

The Corporate God as the New Jerusalem

The main contents of the New Testament are that the Triune God has an eternal economy according to His good pleasure to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people in His life and nature in order to make them His duplication that they may express Him corporately; this corporate expression is the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.¹¹

The New Jerusalem is a composition of divinity and humanity mingled, blended, and built up together as one entity (John 14:20, 23; Rev. 21:2-3, 9-23). All the components have the same life, nature, and constitution and thus are a corporate person, the mingling of the processed and consummated Triune God with His redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people. Our God is the processed and consummated Triune God, and we are His redeemed and regenerated people, who are in the process of being sanctified, renewed, transformed, and conformed and who will be glorified with the divine glory. The New Jerusalem, therefore, is not merely God nor merely man—it is the ultimate mingling of the Triune God and the tripartite man that produces a corporate God-man for God's expression.

The New Jerusalem, as the consummation of the Bible, is the ultimate consummation of the building up of the believers (Eph. 4:16), who have been made God in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression but not in the Godhead. "To be

deified” is “to be constituted with the processed Triune God to be made God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. In this sense we may speak of the deification of the believers, a process that will consummate in the New Jerusalem” (Lee, *Job* 122). From this we see that there is an intrinsic relationship between the believers’ becoming God and the producing of the New Jerusalem. The latter is impossible without the former. The New Jerusalem involves God becoming man and man becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead and God and man being mingled together to be one entity (John 14:20; 15:5). The New Jerusalem is a composition of God’s chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified people who have been deified (3:6; Heb. 2:11; Rom. 12:2; 8:29-30). For us to be deified for the New Jerusalem means that we are being constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God so that we may be made God in life and in nature to be His expression for eternity. Hence, deification is a process that will consummate in the New Jerusalem. This glorious entity is built by God’s constituting Himself in Christ into humanity to make His people the same as He is so that God and His redeemed people may become a corporate entity (Rev. 21:11, 18-21). The New Jerusalem is a constitution of God and man, who are constituted into one another to become a mutual dwelling place (vv. 3, 22).

The mutual dwelling place is the enlarged God, God in His expansion (4:2-3; 21:10-11). In the beginning God was the single God (Gen. 1:1), but at the end God, in His economy, will be the great corporate God—the New Jerusalem, the aggregate and totality of all the God-men built up together in the Triune God.

As the consummation of the divine revelation and the divine economy, the New Jerusalem, the ultimate divine-human organism, will also be the consummation of the divine romance (Rev. 22:17). The Spirit, the consummation of the processed and consummated Triune God, and the bride, the consummation of God’s redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people, will be a universal couple expressing the Triune God for eternity (21:11, 23). The one who is man yet God will be the wife, and the One who is God yet man will be the Husband. According to its humanity, the New

Jerusalem will be the human wife with the divine life and nature, and according to its divinity, the New Jerusalem will be the divine Husband, the redeeming God with the human life and nature. The New Jerusalem, as the union of the Spirit and the bride, is a corporate person; that is, the New Jerusalem is the corporate God-man, the corporate God, constituted of the processed and consummated Triune God united, mingled, and incorporated with the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man (vv. 2, 10-11). The New Jerusalem is thus a marvelous, divine-human composition:

The New Jerusalem is a composition of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified people who have been deified. On God's side, the Triune God has been incarnated to be a man; on our side, we are being deified, constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God so that we may be made God in life and in nature to be His corporate expression for eternity. (Lee, *Job* 122)

In light of all the foregoing, it is neither unreasonable nor unfaithful to testify, as we have labored to do, that in His economy God has become, in His organic relationship with His redeemed people, the corporate God. God has made Himself one with His redeemed elect and has made them one with Him in the organic union. Those who participate in this union by being one spirit with the Lord are not isolated, independent, individualistic units; rather, they are parts of the one new man, a universal corporate person. Now God, to His delight, does not simply have a multitude of believers who are one with Him individually; He has a new man who is one with Him corporately. This corporate God-man is presently undergoing, in God's organic salvation, the process of deification in order to become God in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression. The result is the corporate God as the vine, the Body, and the New Jerusalem.

We need to keep in mind, however, that the corporate God in the economy of God cannot and does not replace God in His immutable Godhead. God in His unique Godhood and Godhead is eternally immutable, and thus He cannot change. Nothing can diminish Him,

and no one can equal Him. In and with the Godhead, God—the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is God alone. The corollary to this indisputable fact is that the Body of Christ, which consummates as the New Jerusalem, will never join the Godhead to be an object of worship. No, the New Jerusalem as the wife of the redeeming God, although deified, will take the lead in the new heaven and new earth to worship her Husband—the Lamb, the redeeming God. On the one hand, the New Jerusalem as the corporate God will worship the unique, eternal three-one God. On the other hand, the New Jerusalem, in union with the Triune God, will express Him, represent Him, and satisfy Him for His eternal delight. The redeeming God and His counterpart—the universal couple—joined forever in the marriage union (22:17) speak together as one: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come!” May all the Lord’s people throughout the earth hear this precious speaking of the corporate God. **AC**

Notes

¹Understandably, there is a paucity of material on this subject. Writing for a publication called *The Rebuilders*, Milt Rodriguez has a short article entitled “The Corporate God” and promises a forthcoming book entitled *The Corporate Life of God*. Witness Lee, whose writings form the background for the major points in this essay, has said, “Just as the Bible begins with God, so it ends with God. In the beginning He is a simple God, a God who is triune; at the end a city appears, and that is the corporate God. The New Jerusalem is God’s enlargement and expansion, God’s expression in eternity, which is the corporate God” (*How to Be* 50).

²One indication of the growing interest in the subject of deification was a conference on the subject “Partakers of the Divine Nature” hosted by Drew University in 2004. Two examples of papers presented are “Becoming by Grace What God Is by Nature: A Trinitarian Synopsis of Theosis in the Theologies of Chrysostom and Wesley” and “United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification.”

³The spirit in Romans 8:4 is not simply the divine Spirit nor our

regenerated spirit but the Spirit one with and mingled with our spirit; hence, we speak here of the mingled spirit, the Spirit of the Lord joined to our regenerated spirit to be one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), a mingled spirit that is both human and divine.

⁴Since newness is God, for the believers in Christ to become new means that they become God; that is, they become the same as God in His attribute and element of newness. Ultimately, all the renewed believers, being matured, perfected, and glorified sons of God, will be the components of the ultimate corporate person, the consummation of the one new man—the New Jerusalem.

⁵However, the natural human mind can neither grasp nor understand these profound facts and may in fact oppose them. This kind of opposition originates from the mind occupied by Satan (Matt. 16:23) and exhibits the urgent need of the believers to experience the renewing of the mind.

⁶Christ's incarnation and God-man living fulfilled God's intention in His creation of humankind (Gen. 1:26; John 1:1, 14; Luke 1:31-32, 35; 2:40, 52). God in His Divine Trinity desires to disperse Himself into us and to work Himself into us to make us His duplication for His expression (Eph. 1:9; 3:9; Col. 1:27). The incarnation of Christ is closely related to God's purpose in His creation of humanity in His image and according to His likeness—that human beings would receive Him as life and express Him in His attributes. The Lord Jesus as the God-man was born of the human essence with the human virtues in order to uplift these virtues to such a standard that they can match God's attributes for His expression. As the One who was conceived of the divine essence with the divine attributes to be the content and reality of His human virtues, Christ's divine attributes fill, strengthen, enrich, and sanctify His human virtues for the purpose of expressing God in His human virtues. When we believed into Christ and were regenerated, Christ came into us as the One with the human virtues filled with the divine attributes. Such a life saves us from within and uplifts our human virtues, sanctifying and transforming us, fulfilling God's desire that all the believers in Christ would become a reproduction of Christ, the God-man, who lived a life in which the attributes of God were expressed in the virtues of man.

⁷Because the first grain is God, we may say that, in a restricted sense, the many grains, as the many God-men, are the reproduction of God. God is pleased with this reproduction because His reproduction has His life and nature but, of course, not His Godhead.

⁸The living of the corporate new man should be exactly the same as the living of Jesus. In other words, the way Jesus lived as the first God-man should be the way the one new man lives as the corporate God-man. As we are renewed in the spirit of the mind and thereby put on the new man in a practical way, we live a life that corresponds to the life of Jesus—a life according to the reality that is in Jesus (Eph. 4:20-21). The Lord Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God. In His living He was one with God, and God was manifested in His living. Now as parts of the new man, the corporate God-man, we need to learn Christ and be taught in Him to live a life of reality, that is, a life in the shining of the light and in the expression of God (Matt. 11:29). This makes the life of the one new man a life that is of the reality in Jesus. As a corporate person, this corporate God-man should live a life as Jesus did, a life of reality expressing God. The proper church life is such a corporate God-man living.

⁹“We human beings need to be deified, to be made like God in life and in nature, but it is a great heresy to say that we are made like God in His Godhead. We are not God in His Godhead, but in His life, nature, element, essence, and image” (Lee, *Christian* 134).

¹⁰It is important to distinguish *incorporation* from *corporation*. Although the two terms are closely related, there is a significant difference between them. A *corporation* is a group of people combined or associated into one body, usually for the purpose of business or government. An *incorporation* is a matter of union and intimate mingling. To *incorporate* is to unite intimately, to blend, combine, or mingle thoroughly into a whole. *Incorporation* denotes both an act of incorporating and the state of being incorporated. Whereas *union* concerns our oneness in life with the Lord, and *mingling* is related to the divine and human natures, *incorporation* is a matter of persons in a relationship of coinherence.

¹¹For a study of the New Jerusalem as the corporate God-man,

see Ed Marks, "The New Jerusalem—a Corporate Person," *Affirmation & Critique*, 5.2 (2000): 45-65. For a study of the New Jerusalem in relation to deification, see Bob Danker, "Aspects of the New Jerusalem: Deification," *Affirmation & Critique*, 7.2 (2002): 100-104.

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