

THE GOD Who Cannot Deny HIMSELF

by John Pester

In every age of human existence, from the most primitive to the most technologically advanced, humanity has sought solace in the idea of a powerful God who directs the affairs of the universe in the midst of the turbulent vicissitudes of human existence. When this perception is integrated into the doctrine of most major religions of the world or into the more secular strains of human culture, it is often encapsulated in a view of God as a singular figure or force: There is an emphasis on singularity in these notions of God because an all-powerful figure or force, by axiomatic implication, must be without equal. While this view may temporarily assuage human anxieties, it rests upon a fallen, natural, and purely human understanding of God. It is a creation of God in the image of man, the product of an unrenewed mind (Rom. 12:2); consequently, it falls short of the full knowledge of the true God who created man in His image.

As much as humanity desires to know God, the true God is beyond mere human comprehension. A full knowledge of God is beyond the things that eyes have seen, the things that ears have heard, and even the things that come up in man's heart (1 Cor. 2:9-10). While we cannot know God, He is mercifully willing to make Himself known to us (Col. 1:26). True knowledge of God, consequently, depends entirely upon a revelation of God from God Himself (Eph. 1:17).¹ Such a revelation is both objective and subjective. God reveals Himself objectively in the things that He has made and in the Word that He has given (Rom. 1:20; 2 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 3:3-4). Through His creation and His Word, He magnifies and sanctifies Himself in order to be known as Lord in the eyes of the nations (Ezek. 38:23). God also reveals Himself subjectively through an economic operation that imparts and joins Himself to redeemed humanity (Gal. 1:15-16; John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17). In His economy (Eph. 3:9), He glorifies Himself in order to be known through Christ and the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (3:21; 1:23).

Here is a divine mystery: God is beyond human comprehension, yet He desires to be fully known.² Equally mysterious is the fact that no one has ever seen God, who dwells in unapproachable light (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16), yet He willingly approaches humanity through His economic operation in order to be subjectively manifested through humanity (3:16). In His revelation of Himself, however, God has no inclination to circumscribe or simplify the scope of His revelation in order to conform to unrenewed notions of His work or His person (Rom. 9:20). He sees no need to justify Himself in the eyes of humanity, knowing that He will be found by those who diligently seek Him, and that those who find Him will see Him and justify Him as He truly is (10:20; 3:4).³

The truth concerning God rests upon the unchanging attribute of His faithfulness. God is faithful,⁴ and in His faithfulness, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Even though the faithfulness of God is demonstrated in His work among and for humanity, it is, first and foremost, demonstrated in His continuous validation of His very being. He is God, and He is faithful to not deny Himself. When Moses inquired of the hidden God concerning His name, he received a logically redundant but faithful response, "I AM WHO I AM...say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you" (Exo. 3:14). When the Jews inquired of the incarnated God concerning His relationship to Abraham, they received a logically implausible but faithful response, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58).⁵ And when the high priest inquired of the soon to be crucified God concerning His status as the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, he received a logically ambiguous but faithful response, "I am" (Mark 14:62).⁶

Because of His faithfulness, God is not concerned with human logic. Consequently, He reveals in His Word and through His economic operation that He is triune. He is not merely one but three-one: He is three yet one, one

yet three. Even though this revelation confounds religious and secular minds,⁷ it is precisely God's faithfulness to the truth of His own being that ultimately enables humanity to believe and receive Him in His economy according to His Word.

In His faithfulness, God the Father demonstrates that there is a divine economy by selecting and predestinating undeserving human vessels into whom He can faithfully impart His triune being (Eph. 1:3-6). In His faithfulness, God the Son extends the operation of the divine economy to humanity by faithfully satisfying the requirements for the forgiveness of offenses through His death on the cross, thereby cleansing the chosen, but polluted and undeserving, human vessels into whom the Triune God can be imparted (vv. 7-12). And in His faithfulness, God the Spirit applies the operation of the divine economy to redeemed humanity by faithfully imparting the Triune God as both a seal and a pledge of God's economic operation (vv. 13-14), an operation that will faithfully call redeemed humanity into the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), which is the fellowship that the Son enjoys in the Godhead.

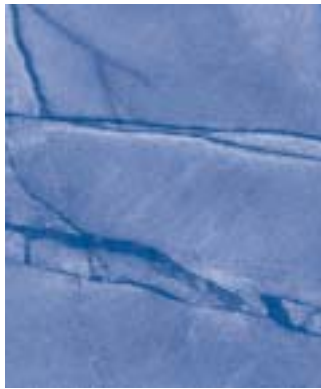
This fellowship is intimate, subjective, and corporate. This is precisely the opposite issue of what is typically implied by the notion of God as being merely one. When God is regarded as one, there is distance rather than intimacy with God, there is an objective rather than subjective relationship with God, and there is a focus on an individual rather than a corporate expression of godliness. There is no need for the impartation of the divine life if maintaining distance, objectivity, and individuality is the focus of our relationship with God. True fellowship with God, however, involves the continuous impartation of the divine life. God is living and full of life. The intimacy that we enjoy through His economy is derived from partaking of His life and nature. The subjective relationship that we enjoy through His economy is derived from being joined to Christ, and the corporate expression of the Body that we become through His economy is derived from the growth of the divine life in the believers.

Apart from the Triune God's faithful revelation of His triune being in His economic operation, humanity could not receive the life of God, and apart from His faithful revelation of His triune being in His Word, redeemed humanity could continuously receive the bountiful supply of the life of God only with difficulty.⁸ Without His

economic operation we would remain in our sins, and without His Word we could be redeemed, but we would remain in our self, as infants lacking the necessary maturity to express the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 6:1; Eph. 4:13). In His faithfulness to His very being, therefore, God manifests His triune being through His economic operation so that He can faithfully impart Himself into those who believe into Him, and He reveals His triune being through His Word in order to establish the believers according to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, which is a revelation of God's economic mystery (Rom. 16:25).

The Divine Revelation of the Triune God

The Bible reveals the Triune God and His divine economy; it is a record of the move of God among humanity, and it fosters God's move in humanity. His desire to enlarge His image and exercise His dominion through humanity is an economical desire that requires an administrative arrangement in order to be accomplished. While



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the notion of a singular God, a One and Only,⁹ conforms to common perceptions of God, it hinders and even frustrates the economy of God. Even the idea of a merciful and benevolently-inclined God, who is objective and apart from humanity, cannot sufficiently convince humanity that the chasm that exists between an almighty Creator and creature of His own making can be bridged. Even when the barrier of sin is discounted, as it is in some religions, the religiously inclined routinely evidence attitudes of objective obeisance rather than subjective intimacy. When the problem of sin is considered, the religiously inclined then routinely evidence attitudes of fearful deference to a judgmental God and consequently seek to compensate for their failures by good works. All of this is contrary to the revelation in the Bible.

Thankfully, the divine revelation of God in the Bible does not speak of God as only a singular figure or force; rather, it speaks of God as a triune being, both in

His essential Godhead and in His economical operation. *Triune* implies both three and one: God is one in three persons. The name (one) of God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (three) (Matt. 28:19). The three persons in the one unique Godhead eternally and mutually coexist and coinhere; that is, they mutually indwell one another. Concerning these truths, there are ample biblical references.¹⁰

The Old Testament declares that there is one God in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah is our God; Jehovah is one." This emphatic declaration is the basis of the Jewish claim of being a monotheistic religion. It is echoed in Psalm 86:10, "You are great, and You do wondrous deeds; / You alone are God." The truth of God being one is also affirmed by verses in the New Testament. When speaking of false gods, that is, idols and the things sacrificed to them, Paul declares, "Concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). When he later speaks of the interaction between the true God and man, Paul states, "There is one God and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

If there were only verses such as these, it would be possible to read all references to God in the Bible as referring to a God who is only one. However, there are other verses in both the Old and New Testaments that speak of the triune nature of His being.¹¹ The Old Testament begins with two significant references to God and to His purpose, each of which utilizes the plural form of the word *God* in the Hebrew language. Genesis 1:1, which introduces God as a Creator with a purpose, says, "In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth." When a short but complete précis of this purpose is introduced in verse 26 of the same chapter, the same plural ending, along with the plural identifiers *Us* and *Our*, is used:

God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

It is interesting to note that these linguistic identifiers related to God's triune nature appear before the more classic formulation of His being one in Deuteronomy 6:4. It is as if there is an initial scriptural emphasis on three, which is then balanced with the truth of His being one, rather than an emphasis on one, which is then balanced with the truth of His being three. The same plural ending for the word *God* is used in Isaiah 45:5, which says, "I am Jehovah and there is no one else; / Besides Me there is no God [Elohim]; / I girded you, although you do not know

Me." In this verse the one God, Jehovah, declares that other than Himself, there is no other God, who is three (Elohim).

In the New Testament, references to the three of the Godhead begin to proliferate because the unfolding revelation of the Triune God corresponds with the unfolding revelation of His economy, which involves the economical processes of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension, each of which stage is accomplished through the incorporate actions of the three persons of the one unique Godhead. The most succinct word concerning the triune nature of God was spoken by the Lord Himself, just prior to His ascension, when He said to His disciples, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). In His utterance, the singular word *name* reinforces the truth that God is uniquely one, but the words *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* reinforce the truth that God is one in three persons.

It is significant that this revelation of God's triune name occurs when His economical process has been fulfilled to the point that humanity can be redeemed and joined to His triune being through baptism. The good news of the deliverance of God's chosen people from the corrupted world is entrusted to disciples, who, like Moses, must be given the name of the true God, in order to convince the nations that their discipleship bears the warrant of the true and faithful God.¹² This revelation also occurs at the point when the consummation of His economical operation truly becomes a corporate endeavor, involving the One who is joined to the disciples, even until the consummation of the age, and the disciples who have been put into the Triune God by being baptized in one Spirit into one Body (1 Cor. 12:13), the reality of which is symbolized by water baptism.

In His economic operation, the Triune God, just as in the essential Godhead, co-exists and coinheres. The reality of co-existence and coinherence is seen in the incorporate acts of the three.¹³ In these acts, the action of one of the three of the Godhead manifests the operation of one or the other two. Verses that demonstrate the reality of coexistence and coinherence are also numerous. These include the verses describing the incorporate actions of the Triune God during the baptism of Jesus:

Having been baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him. And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. (Matt. 3:16-17)

The incorporate actions of the Triune God can be seen also in the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). And the incorporate actions of the Triune God are ultimately demonstrated in the building up of the church: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14); "through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18); and

for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He 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, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. (3:14-19)

The revelation of the Triune God in Scripture is predicated upon His faithfulness to the reality of His intrinsic and economic being. He is triune, and therefore He reveals that He is triune. He can do no otherwise. This faithfulness, which manifests itself as a divine imperative to reveal Himself, is evidence of a divine and eternal desire to impart Himself into humanity and to enlarge His glorious expression through humanity.

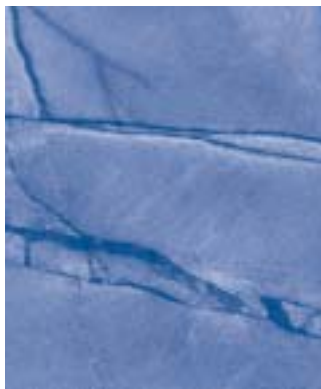
The Divine Desire of the Triune God

The Triune God's faithfulness to Himself and to His economy fulfills a deep and eternal desire within His heart for an enlarged expression of Himself, one which is constituted with His very divine life and holy nature. The outworking of this desire spans from eternity past to eternity future, and it reflects a longing in His heart that is eternally active within His intrinsic being and His economical operation. All these elements can be seen in Ephesians 1:5 through 11:

Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace, which He caused to abound to us in all wis-

dom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him; in whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

The Triune God expresses His life and nature through sonship. His life and nature are expressed through the only begotten Son in the Godhead, who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15),¹⁴ and it is expressed through the reproduction of His life and nature in many sons (Rom. 8:14, 19). This identification in life between both the Son and the many sons is so complete that the Son is not ashamed to call us brothers, since both He and we are all out of One (Heb. 2:11). And so in eternity past in His Godhead, God predestinated some unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself in order to obtain the object of the good pleasure of His will, an enlarged



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expression of Himself (Eph. 1:5). This suggests that there has always been an economical impulse within the Godhead to enlarge and reproduce Himself in many sons, which will issue in a praise to the glory of His grace.¹⁵

Being to the praise to the glory of His grace also implies an economic operation in time because grace was manifested only with the coming of Christ through incarnation (John 1:17). In this operation we, the chosen, can be graced in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6), because the incarnated Christ also obtained redemption and the forgiveness of our offenses through His blood (v. 7). Desiring that we would be graced in the Beloved, the Triune God then operated, again in accordance with the good pleasure of His will, to make known the mystery of His will to us, that is, to bring us into the faithful revelation of Himself and His economy through the ministry of the apostles (v. 9; 3:3, 5). When the riches of Christ are made known (v. 8), grace begins to abound in all wisdom and prudence (1:7-8), and there is a practical entrance into the

economy of God. In this economy the believers, as the Body, are headed up in Christ, the fullness of the times is ushered in, and there is a universal expression of the image and authority of the Triune God in the corporate Christ (v. 10).

Ephesians 1:5-11 speaks of the faithfulness of the Triune God in responding to the eternal desire of His heart by first purposing within Himself to gain many sons who have His life and nature by virtue of their organic union with the Beloved and, then, by working all things according to the counsel of His will in time to faithfully impart His life and nature through His wisdom and prudence to accomplish His eternal purpose (v. 11).

The working of all things according to the counsel of His will is the crowning manifestation of His faithfulness to reproduce Himself in His economy. Even though this work involves His governmental hand over all the affairs of a believer, it, first and foremost, involves the incorporate work of the Son with the Father by the Spirit, the work of passing through the process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension as the life-giving Spirit.

The Divine Process of the Triune God

The economical operation of the Triune God in Christ is summarized in the process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension as the life-giving Spirit. The incarnation brought divinity into sinless humanity so that in Jesus Christ God could become a man. The incarnation of Christ occurred in the fullness of the times according to the faithful determination of God the Father, who sent forth His Son to redeem those under the law so that we might receive the sonship, which is actualized through our experience of the Spirit of His Son in our hearts (Gal. 4:4-6). In His perfect human living, Christ faithfully lived by the life of the Father instead of His human life, establishing His God-man living as a living model into which we could be grafted so that we too can faithfully grow by and in the divine life.

In His obedience to the death of a cross (Phil. 2:8), a death according to the determined, and therefore faithful, counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), Christ dealt with every negative barrier to our receiving of the divine life: "His death destroyed Satan, judged the world, condemned sin, crucified the flesh, crucified the old man, terminated the old creation, and abolished all the ordinances that caused divisions in the human race" (Lee, *Divine* 48). In the death of Christ, the divine life was released from the shell of His humanity, and in His resurrection, this released life regenerated the predestined believers unto a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3). The

resurrection of Christ brought the humanity of Jesus into divinity so that, in turn, the believers could be deified in Christ. In His ascension God fulfilled His faithful oath to seat One from the loins of David upon His throne by giving all authority and power to the Lion-Lamb from the tribe of Judah (Acts 2:30; Rev. 5:5-6). In the ascended Christ, authority has been given to His Body for the carrying out of the will of God on earth in order to consummate the age and to bring in His eternal and unchallenged reign. In His descension as the Spirit, Christ came as the life-giving Spirit to give His life, faithfully fulfilling God's promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14). The life-giving Spirit is all-inclusive, because all the economical experiences of the embodied Triune God (Col. 2:9) have been compounded with the essential aspects of His divinity in order to be applied, as the content of the divine economy, to all those who have the obedience of faith.

The Content of the Divine Economy of the Triune God

The processed Triune God, embodied in the processed Christ, is the very content of the economy of God. This economy was hidden in God and in the ages prior to the incarnation of Christ, because God Himself was hidden (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). As the Triune God progressively revealed Himself in the process of His economical operation, His economy was progressively revealed as well. The Triune God in His economy includes more than just His divinity with all of His attributes; it also includes the humanity of Jesus and all the compounded experiences of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension.

All His economical experiences have been compounded into His essential being and have been made available to be economically applied to redeemed and regenerated humanity in order to manifest an enlarged expression of the Triune God. In His resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, Christ can faithfully apply His compounded triune being into humanity to create an enlarged expression of the Triune God. As the life-giving Spirit, all that Christ has obtained and attained can be applied to redeemed humanity, and just as Christ faithfully passed through an economical path that enables Him to lead many sons into glory, all the believers will pass through this same process when the Spirit as the Son with the Father faithfully applies the economical content of the Triune God to us in our experience.

The Application of the Contents of the Divine Process to the Believers

Through the life-giving Spirit, the Father faithfully reveals His Son in the believers (Gal. 1:15-16), whose

regeneration in their human spirit is another incarnation of the living God into humanity (John 3:6), a humanity that is not intrinsically sinless as was Christ's, but a humanity that has been redeemed and cleansed through the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross. Regeneration is God's faithful response to our faith in the One who has been openly portrayed crucified (Gal. 3:1), a faith which is imparted through a revelation of Himself. Through the life-giving Spirit, the Father faithfully supplies the Spirit for our human living (v. 5), enabling us to walk according to the Spirit in our spirit (5:16, 25; Rom 8:4), and to faithfully fulfill all the righteous requirement of the law in our human living, just as Christ fulfilled all righteousness in His human living (v. 4; Matt. 3:15).

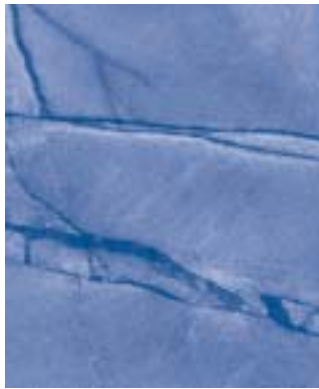
Through the life-giving Spirit, the effectiveness of Christ's death is applied to us, empowering us to overcome sin, sins, the world, the flesh, and the devil. In His death, everything of the self and the old man is also dealt with as He increases in the flow of the divine life, and we decrease in our self and individuality (John 3:30). Through the life-giving Spirit we have been buried "with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

Following the application of the death of Christ to the fallen elements of our being, the life-giving Spirit faithfully applies the resurrection of Christ, bringing us into the newness of life. The God who faithfully raised up Christ will also raise us up in His power because we are joined to the Lord as one spirit, and His experience of resurrection becomes ours in the mingled spirit (1 Cor. 6:14-17). Consequently, we have the assurance of faith that if we have died with Christ, we will live with Him, which is a living in the resurrection life that has been supplied to us as the content of God's economy (Rom. 6:8).

Through the life-giving Spirit we have been raised together with Him and seated together with Him in the heavenlies in order that "He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). The grace that will be displayed in our mutual position in ascension with Christ is the grace that we receive through faith, which is not of ourselves (v. 8); rather, it is the faithful gift from a faithful God who desires to obtain the fullest expression of Himself through the church by not denying

Himself as the content of this expression. The church, as the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:23), will be an ascended testimony of the fulfillment of the economy of God.

Through the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit who was not yet but was promised in the time of both the old and new testaments (John 7:39; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21; John 14:16-17), begins to flow, having been breathed into the disciples for their life and living and having been poured out upon them for their work of discipling the nations into the name of the Triune God (20:22; Acts 2:33; Matt. 28:19). When the Lord breathed Himself into them on the day of His resurrection, they knew that Christ was in the Father, that they were in Christ, and that Christ was in them (John 14:20). They knew that they had been economically joined to the Triune God and had been brought into the fellowship which is with the Father and with His Son (1 John 1:3). And when the Spirit was poured out upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), they knew that they had been clothed with



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the promised power from on high (Luke 24:49). They knew that they had been equipped to carry out the Triune God's continuing economical work as the corporate Christ, a work of enlarging and building up the kingdom of God on earth by speaking forth as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1; Acts 2:14-36).

In his initial speaking, Peter spoke of the process of God's economy—His incarnation (v. 30), His humanity (v. 22), His death (vv. 23, 27, 36), His resurrection (vv. 24, 28, 31-32), His ascension (vv. 33-35), and His descension as the Spirit for His economical impartation into those who call upon His name (vv. 17, 33, 21), thereby pricking the hearts of many who were present and then imparting the processed Christ as the content of God's economy into them (vv. 37-41). Through His divine process, the Triune God reveals Himself to humanity in order to be received by humanity. His revelation to humanity is also a dispensing of Himself into humanity, because it imparts the very content of the revelation.

The Divine Means of Imparting the Triune God

The divine means of imparting the Triune God as the content of His economy is the Word, beginning with the incarnated Word and continuing with the faithful word, the word of the Bible, which is according to the apostles' teaching of God's economy. Apart from the person and work of the incarnated Word, the reality of the divine economy in Christ would be beyond the reach of humanity because there would indeed be no fellowship of light with darkness without the redemption accomplished by the Word who became flesh.

But even with the accomplished work of the incarnated Word, there is a further need for the faithful word, which is according to the apostles' teaching. Titus 1:9 speaks of "holding to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching of the apostles." According to a limited understanding, the teaching of the apostles is according to the faithful word, not the other way around; that is, we might assume that the teaching of the apostles is only a repetition of the word of God, which is contained in the written Word, the Bible. Instead, the written Word, which is the faithful word, is the teaching of the apostles. This is a historical fact.

The teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42) eventually became the New Testament. This indicates that (1) the churches were established according to the apostles' teaching and followed their teaching, and (2) the order of the churches was maintained by the faithful word, which was given according to the apostles' teaching. The disorder in the church was due mainly to deviation from the apostles' teaching. To counter this, we must hold to the faithful word taught in the churches according to the apostles' teaching. In a darkened and confused situation, we must cleave to the enlightening and ordering word in the New Testament—the apostles' teaching. (Recovery Version, Titus 1:9, note 3)

Before the New Testament was written, the teaching of the apostles was in circulation, being carried by beautiful feet shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15), and these verbal words were used by the Triune God in His economical move to save sinners, establish churches, and perfect the members unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ (v. 19; Rom. 16:25; Eph. 4:12). But as the church degraded, there was a need to establish a firm, but still economical, means for imparting the reality of the incarnated and processed Word for the sake of fulfilling God's economy. The means in response to this need became the written words of the New Testament, inscribed on parchments and committed from one faithful generation of believers to a successive generation of believers (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:13; Eph. 3:3).

When the words of God's economy are taught and spoken, and profane, vain babblings are turned away from (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16), there is an operation that operates in power through the ministry of the word to present those who receive the apostles' teaching as full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28). The apostles' teaching imparts faith through the hearing of faith: When a person hears, appreciates, and receives the truth of God's economy, the word concerning the processed Christ, the reality of Christ with all His obtainments and attainments, is also imparted into him. And as these riches are experienced through the continuing supply of the Spirit in the word, the believers are transformed and conformed into the image of Christ and built up as the Body of Christ for the enlarged expression of the Triune God.

As an organic dispensing, who is realized as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Triune God must and will faithfully impart Himself into redeemed humanity. He is triune for dispensing, and as a God who is faithful to His very being, He reveals that He is triune, both through incarnation and through the written word of the apostles' teaching, knowing that the understanding that He will give in regard to His triune being will provoke a response of faith in us (2 Tim. 2:7). His understanding is His imparting, and when He imparts Himself, He imparts Himself as the God who cannot deny Himself. And so even in our unbelief, we believe because He is; and even in our limited grasp of His mysterious triune being, we know that He is God and that we are His sons. May the Lord continue to give us understanding in these matters! **AC**

Notes

¹The essential prerequisite for a full knowledge of the Triune God is the divine life: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). The mere acquisition of doctrinal knowledge is insufficient, because the full knowledge of God depends upon a subjective, experiential knowing of God that comes from being joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The Triune God makes this knowing possible through His economic operation, which involves the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, giving regenerated believers a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him (Eph. 1:17). The goal of this knowledge is that we would all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13). Arriving at the full knowledge of the Son of God is dependent upon our growth in the divine life, which is manifested through our being renewed as the new man, the Body of Christ, unto full knowledge according to the image of Christ (Col. 1:10; 3:10).

²This apparent contradiction in God's faithful Word—a clear declaration that no one can know the mind of the Lord (Rom. 11:34; Isa. 40:13), but the equally clear declaration that

it is possible to fully know God even as we are fully known (1 Cor. 13:12)—is not a contradiction at all. The former declaration relates to the innate inability of fallen human beings to know God, and the latter declaration, to a God-granted ability to know Him (Eph. 3:16-19). An unregenerated human being does not possess the divine life, and without the renewing element of the divine life, which contains the capacity to know God because it is God Himself, he is constitutionally incapable of knowing God.

A regenerated human being, however, possesses the divine life, and therefore, as he is progressively renewed in the spirit of his mind by the spread of the divine life from his spirit to his mind, the knowing faculty of his soul, his renewed mind, becomes nothing less than the mind of Christ (4:23; 1 Cor. 2:16). Paul acknowledges both of these realities:

A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually. But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (vv. 14-16)

A soulish man, a person governed by the unrenewed impulses of his soul, cannot know the mind of the Lord. However, a spiritual man lives according to a different reality.

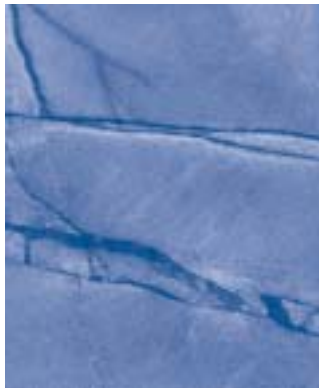
A spiritual man is one who denies his soul and does not live by his soul but allows his spirit, that is, his regenerated spirit, which is occupied and energized by the Spirit of God, to dominate his entire being. Furthermore, he lives by such a spirit, moving and acting according to it (Rom. 8:4). Such a spiritual person is able to discern the things of the Spirit of God because his constitutional capacity for spiritual perception is able to manifest its function. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 2:15, note 1)

The constitutional capacity of a spiritual man is Christ Himself. A soulish man cannot know the mind of the Lord; he does not have a proper, accurate, or firm epistemological foundation to even objectively know God or the things of God. A spiritual man, however, has this and more. Rather than being able only to objectively know the mind of the Lord, he subjectively has the mind of Christ, having been mingled and incorporated into Christ Himself.

³Indeed, God is true in every way in regard to His person and work, and every human conception of God is a lie, the repetition of which makes every man a liar (Rom. 3:4). At the root of these lies is unbelief, but the unbelief of man cannot annul the faithfulness, the truthfulness, of God. While man can accept

the idea of God as one, he cannot accept the idea of God as triune. Nevertheless, this does not annul the truth that He is triune. God does not narrow or circumscribe the scope of His revelation in order to make it easier for humanity to believe. He appears to humanity in the full glory of His economically triune being, and humanity believes. When the light of life appears, how can we not believe and enter into the truthfulness of His very being?

⁴In a footnote to John 8:24, in which Christ initially refers to Himself with the words *I am*, Witness Lee points to the relationship between the meaning of the name *Jehovah* and His move among men. It is important to note that His faithful revelation of Himself in John 8:24 and 58 is related to His economical move: While He cannot deny Himself intrinsically, His faithfulness is principally directed toward not denying Himself in His economy. In His economical move, we may be faithless, but He never is. He will complete the good work that He has begun, because He is faithful to His economy (Phil. 1:6), which is simply the application of His processed triune being to humanity.



As a God who is faithful to His very being, He reveals that He is triune, knowing that the understanding that He will give in regard to His triune being will provoke a response of faith in us.

I am (vv. 28, 58) is the meaning of the name *Jehovah* (Exo. 3:14), and *Jehovah* is the name of God (Gen. 2:7), the One who is and who was and who is coming, the self-existing and ever-existing One (Rev. 1:4; Exo. 3:14-15). This name is used in speaking of God in His relationship with man. Hence, it indicates that the Lord is the ever-existing God who has a relationship with man. (Recovery Version, John 8:24, note 1)

⁵Christ surely was aware of the consequences of offending the religious sensibilities of the high priest in His response, but in His faithfulness to the truth of His being, He could not remain silent. His boldness is a pattern and a supply for the believers, who need to be joined to such a faithful One, in speaking with boldness the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19), no matter the consequences.

Concerning His behavior the Slave-Savior would not answer His faultfinders' false accusation, yet concerning His divine person, His deity, He was not silent but answered strongly and definitely, affirming His deity in

His humanity by stating that as the Son of Man He would sit at the right hand of God. (Recovery Version, Mark 14:62, note 1)

⁶In His faithfulness, He calls the believers into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). In His faithfulness, the fullness of the Godhead was embodied in Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). In His faithfulness, He will complete His calling and saving work by sanctifying the believers wholly—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23-24). In both His person and work, He is faithful and true, and His words are faithful and true (Rev. 19:11; 22:6). The words that are faithful and true, as directed by the Lord, are the words that were written and taught by the apostles (21:5). When we hold to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching of the apostles (Titus 1:9), the healthy teaching brings us into the faithful operation of the economy of God.

⁷Secular minds, that is, minds entrenched in the fallen notions of God, which occupy the thoughts of the unredeemed, explicitly and forcefully reject the truth of God as a triune being in His essential Godhead. In contrast, minds entrenched in merely doctrinal notions of the Triune God, often implicitly, but just as forcefully, reject the truth of God as a triune being in His economy. When considering God in regard to His essential Godhead, a religious mind can accept the truth that the Father, Son, and Spirit mutually co-exist and coinhere, being distinct but not separate. But in His economical coming forth through incarnation and in His economical impartation through resurrection, the truth of the mutual coinherence in the Godhead is often jettisoned because the persons in the Godhead are viewed as separate and distinct following the incarnation.

Even though we believe, there are degrees of unbelief within us, especially in regard to the economy of God. But our unbelief does not annul God's faithful revelation of Himself. Consequently, He has no problem or hesitation in declaring through the apostles that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ bodily (Col. 2:9), or that the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), or that the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Receiving these truths is related to the renewing of our mind, which depends upon a continuing revelation of the Triune God from the Triune God: Paul's prayer for a spirit of wisdom and revelation is directed toward believers, not unbelievers (Eph. 1:17).

⁸I am careful in this section to not imply that a belief in the truth of the Triune God is necessary for a believer's initial salvation, involving his reconciliation to a righteous and just God; it is not. An appreciation for this truth is, however, critical to a believer's continuing salvation in life (Rom. 5:10). The simple message of the gospel does not require an in-depth understanding of the Triune God. In order to receive the salvation that has been prepared for us, a person must simply believe into Christ and confess with his mouth (10:9), having received through the hearing of faith an understanding and appreciation for Christ's work of bearing our sins in His body on the tree (Gal. 3:2; 1 Pet.

2:24). He has satisfied the righteous requirement of the law on our behalf (Rom. 8:3-4), enabling God to justify us because of our faith (3:24, 28), which is also the faith of Christ (v. 22).

When we receive Christ, we genuinely receive Christ, even if we do not have a full comprehension of the reality of our new birth. This is similar to the situation of newborn babies—they certainly have life, but their nascent awareness of life is minimal at best. God's economic operation enables humanity to receive God's initial salvation, that is, through the actual economic process of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, the genuine rebirth of fallen humanity with the life of the Triune God is made possible. God's Word, especially the revelation of His triune being, then enables redeemed humanity to receive God's continuing salvation unto maturity. The reality of the incarnation of the Word and the existence of the Bible as the word of God reflects God's desire for all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

When we receive the truth of the Triune God, there is a response of faith similar to what we experienced at the moment of our regeneration. In our response, there is a realization that when we ask, He can supply us with Himself as living water. This living water is imparted as rivers of living water from the Spirit who was not yet, who came into being through the resurrection of the last Adam, Jesus Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, a step which consummated the economic operation of the Triune God and which is revealed in the Word of God (John 4:10; 7:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:45). Knowing from the Word that God can and will dispense Himself into us is a marvelous revelation, a momentous seeing that aligns our living with the desire of the Triune God and enables us to grow with His growth in us (Col. 2:19).

⁹To speak of God as a One and Only denies the core tenet of the Christian faith concerning the triune nature of God, which is expressed through the biblical identification of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The Scriptures speak of God as both Father and Son, indicating an eternal, coinhering fellowship in life between God the Father and God the Son in the Godhead. This fellowship involves an eternal dispensing of the divine life from the Father and an eternal receiving of the divine life in the Son within the Godhead. The incarnation of the Son extended this axiomatic principle into the sinless humanity of the divinely conceived Jesus Christ, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead extended this principle into the redeemed humanity of those who believe into Him.

The idea of God as the One and Only nullifies the identification of God as both Father and Son. This nullification is explicit in the teachings of Islam. Surah 112:1-3 of the Qur'an declares, "Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten." Within this denial of the persons of the Father and the Son, there is also a denial of the economy of God, which is derived from these identifiers of His axiomatic being. Thus, a God who is viewed as the One and Only will remain apart from humanity and objective to humanity.

¹⁰The verses in the following section are by no means intended to be exhaustive. They are illustrative. However, the fact that they are in the pages of the Holy Scriptures requires that we faithfully consider them and allow them to teach us, to reprove and correct both our actions and our concepts, and to instruct us in righteousness. Without receiving the full revelation in the Bible, it is impossible for the man of God to be complete in this age (2 Tim. 3:16-17). According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, there are over 4400 references to just the word *God* in the Bible. Each of these can shed further light on one or more aspects of His triune being.

¹¹All the verse references in this section are taken from the first outline in *Outlines for Training, Book One*. In this chapter, which focuses on the Triune God, two of the major headings are "God is uniquely one" and "God is triune." In reviewing the outline and the verses, I was struck with the realization that there was not an outline heading entitled, "God is uniquely three" or even "God is three," which would seem to be warranted if there is a desire to show the biblical basis for the three of the Godhead.

But while it is truthful to say that God is one, and that He is even revealed as uniquely one, it is not equally precise to say that God is three or revealed as three. Rather, He is revealed as three-one or one-three, but never only as three, as this would imply separation in addition to distinction in the Godhead. Those who either implicitly or explicitly accept the notion of both separation and distinction are, in effect, tritheists. The truth, however, is fine, and the interpretation and presentation of the truth must also be straight and equally fine (2 Tim. 2:15).

¹²I remember listening to a message given by Witness Lee (I cannot recall the specific date), in which he was speaking about is too high for the average Christian. In response to what he regarded as a harmful and debilitating assertion, he remarked that he had always been burdened to preach the gospel to the poor, rural, and uneducated in Mongolia, but that he had not been given the liberty in the Lord. Then he said that if the Lord would allow him to go, the first message that he would speak to the Mongolian people would be about the processed Triune God, trusting in the power of the faithful word. Every human has a God-given capacity to receive and appreciate the truth, because they have a God-given capacity to receive the Triune God who is truth itself.

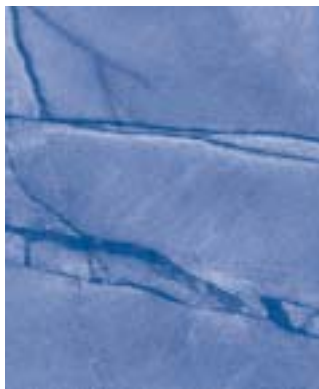
The most powerful truth is the reality of the Triune God Himself, who substantiates Himself by faith within those who hear and receive the word of God. This substantiating faith comes from the very triune being of the God who cannot deny

Himself. A faithful steward and disciple should not try to measure out the truth according to his limited perception of his listeners' capacity to receive; rather, he should trust in the faithful word and in the power of the revelation of the Triune God, which impart the Triune God and, hence, faith, into those who have been created as vessels of mercy to contain Him. This principle applies to all items of the truth.

¹³See the series of articles on incorporation by Kerry S. Robichaux, which began in the 2004 issues of *Affirmation & Critique* and continued in the last issue of 2007 and this first issue of 2008.

¹⁴*Image* in Colossians 1:15 does not refer to physical form but to an "expression of God's being in all His attributes and virtues" (Recovery Version, note 1).

¹⁵Theologians often refer to the Triune God in His essential being as the essential or immanent Trinity, and to the Triune God in His economic operation in time as the economic Trinity. This distinction is useful, but in some respects it should not be viewed as absolute. As Ephesians 1:5-11 shows, the operation of



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predestinating us unto sonship was an operation in eternity past, outside of time, within the essential Trinity. This operation occurred before the initiation of the economic act that most theologians regard as the beginning of the work of the economic Trinity—the incarnation of Christ. The operation within the essential Trinity of predestinating us unto sonship may reflect, in part, the eternal dispensing of life from the eternal Father and the eternal begetting in life of the only begotten Son in the essential Godhead.

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