

AFFIRMATION & CRITIQUE

MONOGRAPHS

THE CENTRAL
WORK OF GOD

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Anaheim, California

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The Central Work of God

by Ron Kangas

The Bible is a revelation of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in His person, essence, attributes, economy, salvation, and dispensing. The Bible is also a revelation of God’s work. The work of the Triune God, a work universally vast and all-embracing, is in four stages: in eternity past—the stage in which God made His economy, chose and predestinated the believers before the foundation of the world, and, probably, held a “council” among the Trinity of the Godhead concerning the coming creation and redemption; in the Old Testament dispensation—the stage in which God created the universe and humankind, dealt with fallen humanity, called Abraham to be the father of the chosen race, gave the law and enacted the old covenant, presided over the history of Israel, and prophesied concerning the coming of Christ; in the New Testament dispensation—the stage in which God sent the Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin to redeem those under the law so that they might receive the sonship (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4-5) and in which He accomplishes a full and complete organic salvation for the producing and building up of the Body of Christ and establishes His kingdom on earth during the millennium; and in eternity future—the stage in which, as the redeeming God, He will administrate within the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1-2). Through a study of the Scriptures and an

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examination of the historical development of Christian thought, it is possible to comprehend this marvelous work, if not in whole at least in some of its parts. However, the common situation among believers—so common that it is virtually universal—is that very few, including theologians, have a clear view of the most vital, crucial, and significant aspect of God’s work—the central work of God.

God’s Good Pleasure

If we would know the central work of God, we need to know God’s good pleasure, for God operates in us “the willing and the working for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Unlike the book of Romans, which was written from the perspective of the fallen condition of humankind, the book of Ephesians was written from the perspective of God’s good pleasure. Ephesians 1:5 reveals that God predestinated us “unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,” and verse 9 says that God made known to us “the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.” This word about God’s good pleasure indicates that God needs pleasure. Yes, God has a need, and His need is for pleasure that is in keeping with His will. If we, who are made in God’s image, need pleasure, then surely God also needs pleasure. Actually, every living being needs pleasure. The more living something or someone is, the more that thing or person needs pleasure. As the most living One—the living One—God needs the most pleasure. To deny the existence of this divine desire and need is to cling to a natural or religious concept of God. The true and living God revealed in the Word of God is a God with a good pleasure.

The phrase *good pleasure* in Ephesians 1 refers to God’s heart’s desire, His heart’s delight. God’s good pleasure is what God likes, what pleases Him. To speak in human terms, God’s good pleasure is what makes Him happy. Something deep in God’s heart pleases Him and makes Him happy; this is His good pleasure. According to the revelation in the Bible as a whole and in the book of Ephesians in particular, the desire of God’s heart is to have many sons who are the reproduction of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29) for the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ through the Body of

Christ, which will consummate as the New Jerusalem. God delights in His Son: “This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). The many sons, who are the reproduction of the Son—the same as He is in life and in nature but not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship—are also the Father’s delight. Nothing brings greater joy to the heart of God than for His beloved Son to be reproduced in the many sons to form the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem.

The desire of God’s heart is related to His will, counsel, purpose, economy, and work. Ephesians 1 speaks of “the good pleasure of His will” (v. 5), “the mystery of His will” (v. 9), and “the counsel of His will” (v. 11). God’s will is His wish, what He wants to do. His will comes out of His heart’s desire, for His will is according to His good pleasure. In Ephesians 1 Paul used a Greek word for *will* that “conveys the idea of desire, even heart’s desire,” a word that is “primarily an emotional word and secondarily volitional. ‘God’s will’ is not so much ‘God’s intention’ as it is ‘God’s heart’s desire’” (Comfort 196). God’s will is therefore an expression of His desire and delight. The universe and everything in it exist because of God’s will: “You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created” (Rev. 4:11). From this we see that “His good pleasure,” embodied in His will, “lies at the heart of the origin of the universe” (Lee, *Life Messages* 94). God’s counsel is the divine resolution consummated in a council of the Divine Trinity, and the counsel of His will issues in the divine purpose (Eph. 1:11). God’s “eternal purpose,” the purpose of the ages, is God’s intent beforehand, His eternal plan “made in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11). “God does have an intention, a purpose, a plan. It is called *prothesis* in Greek (see Eph. 1:11) and it literally means ‘a laying out beforehand’ (like a blueprint)” (Comfort 196). Because God has a purpose, He needs an economy—a household administration and arrangement to carry out His purpose. God’s will comes out of His good pleasure; God’s purpose is based on His will; and God’s economy is His planned administration to carry out His eternal purpose. God’s work with its multifarious activities is for His economy. This work has as its motive the desire of God’s heart, His good pleasure. God has been working and continues to work to satisfy the desire deep within His own being.

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Because Paul realized this, he knew that the Triune God is working in us, the believers in Christ, on behalf of His good pleasure, “doing in us that which is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb. 13:21). Only when we see the connection between God’s work and God’s desire will we have the heart to care about, to be involved in, and to abandon ourselves to the central work of God. An illustration of caring for the desire of God’s heart is found in 2 Samuel 23:15 and 16:

David said longingly, If only someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate! And the three mighty men burst through the camp of the Philistines and drew water from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate. And they carried it and brought it to David.

David did not command the mighty men to fetch water. Rather, he simply expressed his craving, and they, being sensitive to his longing, acted immediately, risking their lives to fulfill the wish of their leader. Oh, that God’s people would respond to Him in such a way! Many serve God according to what they suppose He wants; others respond only to explicit, authoritative commands. Where are those who know the desire of God’s heart, enter into it, and respond to it, even at great cost? Loving God surely implies caring for His good pleasure. It is a blessing, and a privilege to serve God not merely out of obedience but also with fond affection. Those who are sensitive to God’s heart’s desire are blessed, for they shall know God’s central work.

The Triune God Wrought into the Tripartite Man

The central work of God is to work Himself into man. Expressed in a slightly different way, the central work of God is a matter of the Triune God being wrought into the tripartite man (man as a unit of spirit, soul, and body—1 Thes. 5:23). God’s good pleasure, which has become His will and purpose, is to work Himself, by His dispensing and anointing, into the very fiber of the believers’ tripartite being. This work is the center, the focal point, of the operation of the Triune God in the universe. Since God desires to

work *Himself* into His chosen and redeemed people, the material with which God works is nothing less and nothing other than He Himself. For God to work Himself into us means that His intention is to make Himself our inward elements. God is determined to do this; we were designed by Him for this; and neither God nor we can be satisfied until this marvelous inner work has been accomplished in full.

In Ephesians 3:14-19 we have a striking revelation of God's desire to work Himself into man. The book of Ephesians is the heart of

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the Scriptures, and these verses are the heart of Ephesians. In this prayer regarding spiritual experience, Paul prays,

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.

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This is actually a prayer for the Triune God to work Himself into our inner being. Glory is the expression of God in His attributes. In the context of this prayer, the words *His* [the Father's] *glory* indicate that the glory of God is wrought into our inner being. *Power* denotes the fourfold power mentioned in Ephesians 1: resurrection power, transcending power, subduing power, and overruling power. *Through His Spirit* refers to the indwelling Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit. *Into* indicates a transmission, and *the inner man* denotes our regenerated spirit, our real person. *That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith*: For our present purpose this clause is of particular importance. Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of God (Col. 2:9; John 1:16), is unsearchably rich (Eph. 3:8) and universally extensive. The heart is a composition of the three parts of the soul (mind, emotion, and will) plus the conscience (a function of the human spirit). For Christ to make His home in the believers' hearts means that He, as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), penetrates, permeates, saturates, and occupies our inner being, gradually becoming fully settled there. The issue of Christ's making His home in our hearts is that we are "filled unto all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). *Filled* points to an actual condition of being fully saturated and thoroughly constituted with the Triune God, and *unto* indicates the result of being filled. This result is "the fullness of God." Such a fullness, the overflow of the divine riches, is the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ through the Body of Christ, the church. Whereas Christ is God's individual expression, the Body, "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (1:23), is God's enlarged, expanded, corporate expression. It is the desire of God's heart to have a corporate expression of Himself, and to fulfill this desire He is seeking every opportunity to work Himself into us.

If we have a spirit of wisdom and revelation and if the eyes of our heart are enlightened (1:17-18), we will be able to see that Ephesians 3:14-19 is the fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7:12-14a. Second Samuel 7 is an account of David's desire to build a house for God (vv. 1-3), of God's response to David through the prophet Nathan (vv. 4-17), and of David's response to God (vv. 18-29), in which he thanked God, praised Him, and asked Him to build, establish, and bless his house forever according to His promise. This chapter,

however, is more than just a historical record; it is also a chapter of prophecy in typology. Woven into the factual account is a prophecy, but this prophecy is revealed through typology. Thus, it may be regarded as a prophecy in typology.

The locus of both the type and the prophecy is verses 12 through 14: "I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he will be My son." In this prophecy given through typology, "your seed" refers to Christ, indicating that God would raise up Christ as the seed of David (Rom. 1:3), that God would establish Christ's kingdom, that God would be Christ's Father and that Christ would be God's Son (Heb. 1:5), and that Christ would build a house for God's name. The church is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22). In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus Himself uttered the greatest prophecy: "I will build My church." How and where does He build His church, God's house? The answer to both questions is found in Ephesians 3:17: Christ is building the church by making His home in our hearts. Therefore, the house of God built by Christ as the seed of David is the church of the living God built by Christ's working Himself into us. As He works Himself into us, He builds a home for the Triune God within us. This is altogether a matter of God in Christ working Himself into us for His good pleasure.

We exist for God's good pleasure, having been designed and created by God as vessels to contain and express the Triune God (Gen. 2:7; Rom. 9:20-23; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 2 Cor. 4:7). It is therefore human to need God, to have Him as the unique content of our inner being. The human spirit is an organ whose functions are to contact God, receive God, contain God, and even digest God. If we, earthen, human vessels, refuse to receive God in Christ as the treasure of infinite worth, or if we rebel against His desire to fill us with Himself, we will feel empty and sense that life is vain and devoid of purpose. The Christian life is pointless and meaningless unless we submit to, agree with, open to, and cooperate with the operating Triune God in His intention to work Himself into

every part of our being. Once we realize this, we will see that the urgent need is not for us to work for God—it is for God to work Himself into us. Genuine spiritual progress consists in allowing the indwelling Triune God to gain more and more ground within us. The question we must face, then, is this: Will we allow the Triune God to work Himself into our inner being? God is happy to do this, and we can be truly happy only when we let Him do it. Our happiness thus becomes a sign of the happiness of God, who is working Himself into us for His good pleasure.

The God Who Is Working Himself into Us

Who is this God who is working Himself into us? He is not the “raw” God—the self-existing, ever-existing, coinhering Triune God as He exists eternally and immutably in Himself apart from the process through which He has passed in Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The raw God, the unprocessed God, cannot enter into human beings, much less work Himself into their tripartite being. The God who is now operating within the believers, endeavoring to dispense Himself into them and thereby saturate them with Himself, is the processed and consummated Triune God (see Kerry S. Robichaux’s “The Processed and Consummated Triune God”). God is eternally immutable in His essence, but in Christ He has been processed in His economy to become “the Spirit” (John 7:39), the consummated compound Spirit typified by the anointing ointment in Exodus 30:23-25. This Spirit is “the anointing” (1 John 2:20, 27)—the moving of the indwelling processed and consummated Triune God in our regenerated spirit. As the Spirit, the Triune God is working Himself into us by anointing Himself into us. The more we are anointed by Him, the more He is wrought into our being, mingling Himself with us, constituting Himself into us, making Himself one with us and us one with Him, and causing us to be the same as He is in life, in nature, in constitution, and in expression but not in the Godhead.

As God works within us in such a marvelous way, He is the God who hides Himself, the God with a disposition to conceal Himself, the God who operates within us quietly, secretly, and often imperceptibly according to the mysterious hidden nature of

the divine life. "Surely You are a God who hides Himself, / O God of Israel, the Savior" (Isa. 45:15). In the Old Testament God did many things for His people Israel, yet He concealed Himself, preferring to work in a hidden way. The book of Esther is a testimony of God as the hidden One. This book makes no explicit mention of God by name or title—a testimony that, ceaselessly and secretly, God cares for His people in a hidden way as the hiding God. It is not easy for us to know God as the God who hides Himself because our "personalities are diametrically opposed to God's personality. He likes concealment, we like display; He does not crave outward manifestations, we cannot be content without them" (Lee, *Hides* 2-3).

If we would go beyond the appalling superficiality and ostentation of today's Christianity, and if we would rightly understand the character of God's work within us, we need to recognize and accept the hidden nature of His working. We should "not think that only mighty influences, great visions, and tremendous revelations are of Him. God's surest work is done in the secret of our beings.... This is God's mightiest mode of activity" (*Hides* 4-5). We need to know Him, love Him, and trust in Him as such a hiding God, realizing that, in the pneumatic Christ, He is making His home in our hearts *by faith*. There may be no display, no outward show, no sure proof of His working, yet He *is* working persistently, even relentlessly, to make Himself the content of our being. Realizing this, Witness Lee has written,

Since the resurrection of our Lord, the chief discipline for His followers has come along the line of knowing Him as a God who hides Himself. He is in the midst of men, yet does not show Himself to men; He dwells within, yet withholds the consciousness of His indwelling. He is truly in you, and is truly working in you, and working wonderful things, tremendous things; but His disposition is not the disposition of the one...who love[s] to make a display. He is a God who hides Himself...In the deepest depths of your being,...secretly and ceaselessly, the God who hides Himself is working. (*Hides* 17, 21)

The hidden God who is working in us as the compound Spirit is the God of resurrection. Resurrection is life that enters into death, passes through death, and emerges triumphantly from death. God Himself is not only life—He is also resurrection (John 11:25). As the living God, God works for His people to gain something for Himself; as the God of resurrection, God works within His people to bring them into Himself and to work Himself into them. The living God may deliver His people from death so that they may trust Him; the God of resurrection brings His people through death so that He may be wrought into them and that they may thus be filled with Him. The living God maintains His people in the old creation so that they may live for Him; the God of resurrection constitutes His people a new creation so that they may be one with Him and even become Him in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. God's ultimate goal—the reproduction of His Son in the many sons for the building up of a corporate expression of Himself, initially as the Body and consummately as the New Jerusalem—will be attained not mainly by the living God, who works outwardly, but primarily by the God of resurrection, who works inwardly. The reason for this is explained clearly by Witness Lee in *The God of Resurrection*:

While the living God can perform many acts on man's behalf, the nature of the living God cannot blend with the nature of man. When, on the other hand, the God of resurrection works, His very nature is wrought into the nature of man...The living God can work on behalf of man, but the nature of the living God cannot unite with the nature of man. On the other hand, when the God of resurrection works, He communicates Himself to man by that which He does for him...The realization [eventually] deepens that God is not working to make His might known in external acts, but is working to impart Himself...He invariably chooses the lot of each one with this goal in view—an increase of the divine content in our lives. (6, 9, 18)

What God has purposed in Himself to accomplish for His good pleasure—to work Himself in Christ into His chosen people to make

them the duplication and expression of Christ—will be accomplished. He desires to do this, He is determined to do this, and He, as the consummated Spirit, the God who hides Himself, and the God of resurrection, is working in us for this purpose and to this end.

Cooperating with God

As believers in Christ, we need to cooperate with God in His central work, and this requires that, through His grace, we become persons with certain characteristics that may be neither popular among Christians today nor appreciated by those who care more for ostentation than for reality. If we would cooperate with God as He works

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within us, we need a vision of God's central work that governs and directs our relationship with the Lord and our attitude toward His work. "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint" (Prov. 29:18). Today the vast majority of believers are unrestrained in the sense that, instead of following the divine revelation concerning the divine work, they are following their own opinions, personal preferences, subjective impressions, dispositional proclivities, and the trend of the current religious culture. If we would cooperate with God's central work, we need to be limited to and even restrained by the "central lane" of the divine revelation regarding God's good pleasure, will, counsel, purpose, economy, and work.

Next, to cooperate with God in His central work, we must be willing to be filled with the Triune God. Since God desires to work Himself into us and since we were created by Him as vessels to contain Him, it is altogether normal to be filled with God. Alas, many believers are filled and preoccupied with things other than

God, doting on what He does for them or on what He gives them in an outward, material way but not devoting themselves to the desire of God's heart. How can He fill with Himself those who are filled with other things? There is only one way—to be utterly emptied. There is wisdom in the chorus of a hymn that says, "Fill me now! Fill me now! / Fill me with Thy Spirit now! / Strip me wholly, empty thoroughly, / Fill me with Thy Spirit now!" (*Hymns*, #267). Those who are stripped by God are blessed, for they shall gain God and be gained by Him. Those who are empty are also blessed, for they shall be filled with the processed and consummated Triune God.

If we intend to cooperate with the operating God, we need to be poor in spirit and pure in heart. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:3). "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (v. 8). Because our spirit is for God, it must be emptied of anything other than God that may be occupying it. To be poor in spirit is to be emptied in our spirit, in the depth of our being, in order to receive something new and fresh of the Lord. To be poor in spirit is to have a twofold realization: that the Triune God is everything and that in ourselves we are nothing, we have nothing, we know nothing, and we can do nothing. To be poor in spirit is to not be held back by the old things of traditional theology or previous experience. To be poor in spirit is to confess that, no matter what we have known or experienced of God in the past, we now come to Him open, empty, teachable, receptive, and submissive, willing for Him to dispense Himself into us and to work Himself into us according to His good pleasure.

To be pure in heart means that our heart, in which the Lord is making His home, is single, seeking nothing other than the Lord Himself. To be pure in heart is to drop every preoccupying thing within us and to seek the Lord single-heartedly, having the single goal of doing God's will for His glory, delight, and satisfaction. Those who are poor in spirit and pure in heart turn to the Lord in a sincere and simple way, pursuing Him for His purpose and economy.

Those who cooperate with God's inward operation are also those who take care of the inner feelings. By *inner feelings* I mean the

sense of the divine life within us who have believed into Christ and received Him as life. With every kind of life there is a certain sense of life. The higher a particular kind of life is, the higher is the sense of that life. With our human life, a higher life, there is a sense of the human life, and with the divine life, the highest life, there is a sense of the divine life. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the sense of God's life within the believer is the sense of peace, the peace of God that presides in the heart. The inner sense of life is inextricably bound to the move, the anointing, of the Triune God within us. If we ignore or wrongly interpret the inner sense of life, we may hinder God's work in us. But if we rightly discern the sense of the divine life within us and if we cooperate with this sense, we will give more ground to the Lord to work in us. The God who is working Himself into us not only has eternal life—He is eternal life; and it is as life that He is working Himself into our being. The richer our sense of this life is and the more absolute our following of this inner sense is, the fuller will be our experience of God's inward operation.

Those who see the vision of God's central work, who are willing to be filled with God, who are poor in spirit and pure in heart, and who follow the inner sense of the divine life are those who have real prayers. Real prayer is the mutual contact between man and God. Real prayer is man breathing God, gaining God, and being gained by God. Real prayer is man cooperating and co-working with God, allowing God to express Himself and His desire through man and thus accomplish His purpose. Real prayer is God passing through man and his prayer, and man and his prayer passing through God. Real prayer is God and man, man and God, praying together. Real prayer is God's intention becoming man's intention. Real prayer is God's heart's desire passing through man and returning to God (Lee, *Lessons* 13-30). Here I would emphasize another definition of real prayer: Real prayer is God flowing into us, through us, and out of us. This means that real prayer is prayer that allows God to pass through us. Those who do not allow God to pass through them may have religious prayer, but they do not have real prayer—prayer that is actually God praying to God. Prayer that is the Christ within our spirit praying to the Christ in the heavens is prayer that prepares the way for the central work of

God. In fact, this kind of prayer is itself an integral part of God's central work.

“All Things” and the Discipline of the Holy Spirit

For the sake of His central work, which is intrinsically inward, God works on us in an outward way, often to discipline us through various persons, matters, and things in our environment. Romans 8:28-29 speaks of this:

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.

As the context makes clear, God's purpose is that His firstborn Son would have many brothers conformed to His image. This is the reproduction of Christ for the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ. Romans 8 reveals that, for the fulfillment of His purpose, Christ is both at the right hand of God and in us (vv. 34, 10). God is working as the Spirit of life within us (v. 2) to impart Himself as life into our spirit, soul, and body (vv. 10, 6, 11). He is working also through all things for the “good” of His desire, will, purpose, and economy. “All things” refers to all matters, all persons, and all things. Knowing what is needed for His central work, God sovereignly arranges all things in the lives of His children and then causes these things to work together for His purpose. In His wisdom He brings about an amazing coordination between all the matters, persons, and things and His inner operation. On the one hand, God Himself is working inwardly by dispensing Himself into us; on the other hand, God is working outwardly by using all things. The combination of His inward and outward work will be the fulfillment of His desire.

God's causing all things to work together for good is related to the discipline of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His children. The discipline of the Holy Spirit refers to all that the Holy Spirit is doing in our environment to break our self and to consume our

natural person so that God may have a way to work Himself into us, imparting Himself into us and mingling Himself with us in order to constitute us with Himself for His good pleasure. God's ordering of all things is external, but through the Holy Spirit this "may be translated into something inward and applied to us. We call this transforming of the outward happening into something inward, the discipline of the Holy Spirit" (Nee 141).

It is a sad fact that the vast majority of believers make little or no genuine spiritual progress throughout the entire course of their Christian life; they fail to grow in the divine life or to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). God in Christ as the Spirit has come into them, regenerating their spirit and giving them eternal life, but they remain the same year after year. Due either to ignorance or unwillingness, such believers do not give the Lord the ground to work Himself into them. Whatever the situation may be, there is the need for the discipline of the Holy Spirit, a matter Watchman Nee understood very well:

Though we have believed in the Lord and gained new life, many of our habits, character, and nature remain the same as they were before. Such original nature, character, and habits prevent this new life from manifesting itself. Consequently, when people meet us, it is not easy for them to touch the new life of our Lord. What people see is often still our old self...Therefore, after our regeneration, the Lord will do two things with us: on the one hand He will tear down our past habits, personality, and nature. Only by doing this can the life of Christ freely manifest itself through us; otherwise, the life of the Lord will be hampered by the natural life. On the other hand the Holy Spirit will create very carefully a new nature and character with a new mode of living and habits. The Lord will not only tear down the old but also constitute the new in us. There will be not only negative tearing down but also positive constitution. This is the twofold work which the Lord performs on us after our salvation. (139-140)

Note the expression *twofold work*. While God is working outwardly to break us and tear us down, He is working inwardly to build us up by working Himself into us. The outward work is severe; the inward work is sweet. The fact that God is engaged in this twofold work is a strong indication of how determined He is to gain that which will satisfy the desire of His heart and fulfill His longing. For His good pleasure He will tear down what hinders Him and build up what pleases Him. God is operating in us and on us to accomplish His central work, and nothing and no one will stop Him.

The Goal of God's Central Work

In His central work God has a goal—a single, particular, ultimate goal—and this goal is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ. As we pointed out in our discussion of Ephesians 3:16-19, Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is God's individual expression. God's purpose is that His only begotten Son, by passing through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, would, in resurrection, be begotten of God in His humanity to become the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29). That this has actually taken place is revealed in the Lord's words to Mary on the day of His resurrection: "Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John 20:17). Through Christ's resurrection we were regenerated with the divine life, the life of the Triune God, which had been released by the Lord's death. In His resurrection the eternal only begotten Son of God became the firstborn Son, and we, His believers, became His brothers. Since He and we "are all of One," He is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Heb. 2:11). Christ's many brothers are the "many sons" whom the Father is leading into glory (v. 10), that is, into His expression. Before His resurrection Christ, the only begotten Son, was the Father's individual expression. Through His resurrection His brothers, the many sons as the multiplication of the Son in the divine life, were brought forth to be the corporate expression of the Father in the Son.

In order for this expression to be built up in full, we need to be transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18),

and we also need to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). This transformation and conformation and all that goes along with them—growth in the divine life, sanctification, renewing, and glorification—involve the central work of God: God working in us to spread Himself from our regenerated spirit into every part of our soul and even into our body. The goal of this work is the corporate expression of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son, with the believers as the many sons. Today Christ and His believers are the Body, the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). Eventually, the Body of Christ will consummate in the New Jerusalem. For eternity in the new heaven and new earth, the corporate expression of the Triune God, the issue of His central work, will be the New Jerusalem—the ultimate consummation of the mingling of the processed and consummated Triune God with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite people. This is *the* goal of God’s central work.

Our Responsibility

What is the goal of our work? Can we say with a pure conscience that the Christian work we are engaged in or are involved with is the central work of God? A saying popular with certain Christians goes like this: “Only one life—’twill soon be past. / Only what’s done for Christ will last.” At best, this is partially true. Yes, our life will soon be past, but much, if not most, of what is allegedly done for Christ will not last, because it is work performed in the flesh by the natural man and thus is not a work done by Christ, in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. The truth regarding Christian work is this: Only what is done *by Christ* will last. God’s central work is the only lasting work because only this work involves the Triune God in Christ wrought into the tripartite man.

The apostle Paul was God’s co-worker. He worked together with God (2 Cor. 6:1), and he trained his co-workers to do the same. Of Timothy he said, “He is working the work of the Lord, even as I am” (1 Cor. 16:10). Are today’s Christian workers God’s co-workers? Are they working “the work of the Lord” or doing what is right in their own eyes? Paul could refer to his co-workers as “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). What are

today's Christian workers working for—God's kingdom or their own kingdom, a kingdom in which they reign over their personal religious empire?

In Matthew 16:27 the Lord Jesus said, "The Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings." In Revelation 22:12 He said, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is." These verses reveal that when the Lord returns, He will judge our work. In that day many will say to Him, "Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" (Matt. 7:22). But the Lord will declare to them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (v. 23). Such works are lawless because, being in the principle of rebellion, they are not done according to the will of the heavenly Father. "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 21). As we consider these verses, it should be evident that one may do works of power and yet be a worker of lawlessness, one who does not work according to the Father's perfect and purposed will. Surely the will of the Father in verse 21 is the will unveiled in Ephesians 1 and carried out by God's central work. What will the Lord say to us at His judgment seat, before which we all must appear (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10)? To some He will say, "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). To others He will say, "Well done, good and faithful slave...Enter into the joy of your master" (25:21). All Christian workers need to ask themselves a serious question: What will the Lord say to me on that day? Whether He says "Depart" or "Well done" will depend in large measure on whether our work today is a genuine part of the central work of God.

Another crucial portion concerning the judgment of a believer's work is 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds

upon it. For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.


On "the day," the day of Christ's second coming, every believer's work will be proved by "fire"—an impartial, objective test. The fire will

On the day our work is proved by fire,
a handful of gold will be better
than a mound of wood;
a small amount of silver and precious stones
will be of far greater worth than
a heap of grass and stubble.

prove each one's work, "of what sort it is." If one's work stands the test of fire, he will "receive a reward," and thus will obtain not a special place in heaven but the right to reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom as one of His co-kings. If one's work is consumed, "he will suffer loss," not a loss of salvation (which is eternally secure) but a loss of reward in the coming kingdom.

What "sort" of work will pass the test of fire? The work that remains after the proving fire is not the work with "wood, grass, stubble," which signify materials and methods that are natural, fallen, fleshly, and earthly. The remaining work is the work with "gold, silver, precious stones," which signify the Triune God—the

Father with His nature (gold), the Son with His redemption (silver), and the Spirit with His work of transformation (precious stones). The only work that can withstand the fire, the only work worthy of a reward, is the work done in, by, and with the Triune God as the material. Remember, the Triune God is working Himself into us, and the material with which He works is Himself. Those who are God's co-workers, who are one with Him in carrying out His central work, also work with the Triune God as the building materials—the Triune God who has been wrought into them and whom they minister to others. They build not with wood, grass, and stubble but with gold, silver, and precious stones. On the day our work is proved by fire, a handful of gold will be better than a mound of wood; a small amount of silver and precious stones will be of far greater worth than a heap of grass and stubble.

No servant of God should assume that he or she is building with gold, silver, and precious stones. Such an assumption is dangerous and misleading. Those who are self-deceived today will be shocked in that day when they behold an awesome conflagration—the burning of all their wood, grass, and stubble. They themselves will be saved, but they will suffer loss and their works will perish. God's good pleasure is most dear to His heart, and He will reward those who, in love and faithfulness, work "the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 16:10). Blessed are those who share in the central work of God and whose work remains, for they shall enter into the joy of the Lord and receive the kingdom reward. 

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