

# THE SIGNIFICANCE AND APPLICATION OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

**I**n the days immediately after His triumph over sin and death

on the cross, the resurrected Christ was with His disciples both physically and bodily. He walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He breathed into the disciples, He ate with the eleven, He prepared breakfast for the disciples by the seashore, and Thomas touched His wounds. He was not “abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption,” as Peter boldly declared on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:31). The bodily resurrection of Christ should not be denied, and numerous apologetic efforts are directed toward affirmations of the historicity of the resurrection.

Conventional presentations of the Christian faith concerning the resurrection of Christ typically combine facts about the resurrection with a further discussion of its significance. For example, the empty tomb is used as a proof of God’s acceptance of the redemptive work of Christ and ultimately of our justification (Rom. 4:25). Much of this kind of discussion, unfortunately, remains in an objective realm given its association with overly defensive apologetics in this age of unbelief concerning both the existence of God and His involvement with humankind. The Christian preoccupation with proving the bodily resurrection of Christ, however, has hindered us from seeing the intrinsic significance of the resurrection of Christ.

There is much at stake in how we view Christ’s resurrection, given our call to be witnesses of His resurrection. The imperative of witnessing of the resurrection was ever-present with the disciples in the days immediately following the death and resurrection of Christ. Matthias was selected to replace Judas with a view to his participation in witnessing of

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the resurrection of Christ. Peter declared, “Beginning from the

baptism of John until the day on which He was taken up from us, one of these should become a witness of His resurrection with us” (Acts 1:22). Appearing before the Sanhedrin, Peter also declared, “The God of our fathers has raised Jesus, whom you slew by hanging Him on a tree. This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things” (5:30-32). Given the intensity and immediacy of their contact with the resurrected Christ, the early efforts of the apostles in witnessing of the resurrection was clearly centered on the historical validity of the resurrection. Unfortunately, most of the discussion of the resurrection continues to be driven by assertions of the historical validity of the resurrection.

**I**n contrast to continuing debate about the historical validity of the resurrection, the apostles gave fuller utterance to the significance of the resurrection as the immediacy of the resurrection event waned. In addition to ascribing significance to the resurrection on the basis of its historicity, Paul and Peter wrote of the intrinsic significance of the resurrection in the context of the impact of the process of resurrection on the person of Christ, and they wrote of the application of the resurrected Christ to the redeemed and regenerated believers. Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 1 Peter 1:3 speak of resurrection in relation to this aspect of the eternal economy of God. Additionally, these verses underscore the relationship between resurrection and *theosis*, that is, deification, and may help us arrive at a formulation of deification that fully conforms to the divine revelation in the Scriptures.

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## Historicity and Objective Significance

Demonstrations of the historical authenticity of the resurrection, that is, its historicity, have played a prominent role in Christian apologetics from the time of Christ's resurrection until today. Given the unique import of this event, its unprecedented defiance of natural law, its complete fulfillment of prophecy, and its irreversible reversal of the power and certainty of death, skepticism, rather than belief, no doubt was the common reaction in the days and years immediately following the resurrection. It still is today. In addition to natural skepticism, however, some actively worked to undermine the momentous truth of Christ's resurrection through the use of well-placed rumors:

And after the chief priests had gathered with the elders and had taken counsel, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, Say this, His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make sure that you have nothing to worry about. And they took the money and did as they were instructed. And this account has been widely spread among the Jews until this very day. (Matt. 28:12-15)

The resurrection event was also challenged by pagan critics as the gospel spread beyond Judea. Jaroslav Pelikan notes: "It was not only the story of the resurrection of Christ that drew the fire of pagan critics as a fable or the report of a hysterical woman, but the significance attached to the resurrection by Christian theology" (30). Christian apologists defended the resurrection event in the nascent stages of the church's development, and there is a continuing need for

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defense because skepticism still abounds, emanating more from the ranks of popular culture than from the ranks of credible, theological scholarship. Writing in response to the Jesus Seminar's denial of the authenticity of the resurrection, William Lane Craig focuses on three areas of historical proof: the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances of Jesus, and the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection. Ted M. Dorman in *A Faith for All Seasons* devotes seven pages to proofs of the historical accuracy of the resurrection accounts. In particular, he points to the existence of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, the discovery of the empty tomb, the eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ, and the impact of the fact of resurrection in transforming the lives of the disciples.

Dorman's treatment of the resurrection as an event principally in need of historical cum objective validation effectively highlights the prevailing propensity to focus on the historicity rather than the significance of the resurrection. The application of the resurrection in the lives and experiences of the redeemed and regenerated believers is largely ignored. While Dorman devotes seven pages to proofs of the resurrection, he outlines the significance of the resurrection in the following six points, largely describing it in starkly objective terms.

The primary meaning of the resurrection, then, is that in Jesus Christ God has inaugurated His kingdom rule on earth, a rule which shall be consummated in the future when the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). In addition to this, the New Testament sees the resurrection as significant in several other ways.

The resurrection of Christ is *God's declaration of Jesus' divine Sonship*. Paul tells us that Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). This powerful *event*, and not mere words, testified supremely to Christ's divine authority.

The resurrection confirmed that Jesus was *perfectly righteous and therefore an appropriate representative and substitute for sinful human beings*, as Paul portrays Him in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Had Christ not been raised, we would have no reason to believe this and would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17).

The resurrection *demonstrated Christ's victory over death and the power of the devil*. The risen One now rules as Lord, His victory over all other spiritual forces guaranteed (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 2:15).

The resurrection of Jesus *anticipates the final resurrection and glorification of believers*. He is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20), a guarantee of His people's eventual resurrection, even as the first fruits of a crop indicate what the final harvest will eventually look

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like. For this reason 1 John 3:2 states that “when he appears, we shall be like him.”

The resurrection not only witnesses to the final salvation of God’s people, but may be called the *cause* of believers’ *justification, regeneration* (new birth), and *final resurrection*. Jesus “was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). God has given Christians “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Paul wants to share in “the power of [Christ’s] resurrection” in order that he himself might “attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11).

The resurrection brings *redemption* not only to the people of God, but *to the entire order of creation....* (222-223)

Most treatments of the significance of the resurrection are not nearly as thorough as Dorman’s but they are equally as objective. In *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, an introductory textbook for evangelical and fundamental seminary students, Millard J. Erickson boils down the significance of the resurrection to a few sentences.

The resurrection is particularly significant, for inflicting death was the worst thing that sin and the powers of sin could do to Christ. In the inability of death to hold him is symbolized the totality of his victory. What more can the forces of evil do if someone whom they have killed does not stay dead? (237)

While apologetics has a necessary place in the defense of the gospel to skeptics and unbelievers, there should be little need, if any, to defend the gospel to genuine believers, much less to thoroughly objectify it for the members of the household of faith. A living faith constitutes the strongest proof and testimony of the power of Christ’s resurrection. The living Christ cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Rather than standing in awe of the existence of an empty tomb belonging to a Joseph of Arimathea, rather than seeking spiritual validation in a physical pilgrimage to an empty tomb, and rather than contriving endless arguments, the believers should be turned from the objective significance of the resurrection to the intrinsic significance of the process of resurrection on the person of Christ and His subsequent economical application to the redeemed and regenerated believers. We should be brought on in our understanding and appreciation of the resurrection, trusting in both the living and operative word and the indwelling Spirit who expressly guides us into all the reality that has been made available to us through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (Heb. 4:12; John 16:13).

### **Intrinsic Significance and Application**

In order to appreciate the full import of the resurrection,

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we must be willing to view it as more than just a momentous event in the life history of the God-man, Jesus Christ. With a linear view of time that is demarcated and punctuated by discreetly measured units, it is difficult to view the import of a life as being anything more than a resumé, even a running one, of the significant achievements of that life. And so, as Christians, our attention is focused principally on three significant events in Christ’s life: His incarnation, death, and resurrection. Rather than just being discreet accomplishments, each of these events compounded new elements into the person of the Son as He passed through the process of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, and through the Son these elements have been compounded into the very Spirit of God and have been made available to the redeemed and regenerated believers through the Spirit.

Through incarnation, divinity was added to humanity in the person of Christ; through human living, divinity lived in humanity in the person of Christ; through death, divinity was released to humanity in the person of Christ; and through resurrection, humanity was added to divinity in the person of Christ. Simply put, the incarnation of Christ corresponds with the first half of Athanasius’s aphorism that God became man, while the resurrection of Christ corresponds with the last half of Athanasius’s aphorism that man might become God. The intrinsic significance of the resurrection lies in the realization of this aphorism, both in the person of Christ and in us. This intrinsic revelation is succinctly presented in Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 1 Peter 1:3, particularly as they are viewed from the perspective of God’s eternal economy.

Romans 1:3-4 speaks of the two natures of Christ and of the processing of the all-inclusive Christ: “Who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated

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the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” In resurrection Christ was designated the firstborn Son of God. He was acknowledged as God not just by virtue of His eternal, unchanging divinity but also by virtue of His perfect, uplifted humanity. Even in His status as a man, He was declared to be God. In resurrection, man became God in the person of Christ. As such, resurrection involves more than just an objective testimony of Christ’s divine authority, as suggested by Dorman. Witness Lee provides insight into the designation of Christ in his exposition of these verses.

Before His incarnation, Christ, as a divine Person, already was the Son of God (John 1:18). He was the Son of God before His incarnation, and even Romans 8:3 says, “God sent His Son.” Since Christ already was the Son of God before the incarnation, why did He need to be designated the Son of God out of resurrection? Because by incarnation He had put on an element, the flesh, the human nature, that had nothing to do with divinity. As a divine Person Christ was the Son of God before His incarnation, but that part of Him which was Jesus with the flesh, the human nature, born of Mary, was not the Son of God. That part of Him was human. By His resurrection Christ has sanctified and uplifted that part of His human nature, His humanity, and He was designated out of this resurrection as the Son of God with this human nature. (*Romans* 19)

In resurrection Christ did not divest Himself of His human nature; rather, He brought His human nature into the status of the divine. In the heavens there is a man in the glory, and like Stephen, we worship Him as the Son of Man (Acts 7:56). Our access to and experience of the resurrected Christ, however, cannot be fully explained by Romans 1:3-4. Even though it is possible to locate a principle in these

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verses that can account for our destiny within the economy of God, these verses literally speak only of the impact of the resurrection on the person of Christ. The principle in Romans 1:3-4, however, can be applied in our experience because of Paul’s additional description of the post-resurrection status of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:45.

First Corinthians 15 represents Paul’s most complete discourse on the subject of the resurrection. In this chapter he explores not only the eschatological significance of resurrection but also its relevance to the experience of the redeemed and regenerated believers. Paul’s extended discourse flows from his realization of the central importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith.

Resurrection is the life pulse and lifeline of the divine economy. If there were no resurrection, God would be the God of the dead, not of the living (Matt. 22:32). If there were no resurrection, Christ would not have been raised from the dead. He would be a dead Savior, not a living One who lives forever (Rev. 1:18) and is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). If there were no resurrection, there would be no living proof of our being justified by His death (Rom. 4:25 and note), no imparting of life (John 12:24), no regeneration (John 3:5), no renewing (Titus 3:5), no transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), and no conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). If there were no resurrection, there would be no members of Christ (Rom 12:5), no Body of Christ as His fullness (Eph. 1:20-23), and no church as Christ’s bride (John 3:29), and therefore no new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11). If there were no resurrection, God’s New Testament economy would altogether collapse and God’s eternal purpose would be nullified. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 15:12, note 1)

Paul is quite clear about the importance of the resurrection when he declares, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is vain; your faith is vain also....And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (vv. 14, 17). Our faith has been made vital and real through the application of the divine life, just as our deliverance from sins requires both the redeeming death of Christ on the cross and the life-imparting resurrection of Christ. The impartation of the divine life is the continuing work of Christ, and this work is based on the potentiality of His person in resurrection—the life-giving Spirit. Ultimately, the resurrection of Christ has relevance to a Christian only because Christ, as the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit (v. 45). We need to receive the divine life for our regeneration, renewing, transformation, and conformation. Our receiving of life is possible only because Christ became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. Ultimately, this divine life will be manifested in the glorified bodies of the believers (vv. 35-57) as the consummation of the operation of the

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resurrected Christ, who is the indwelling life-giving Spirit in resurrection.

Through the resurrection of Christ, we have received the divine life. First Peter 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” The resurrection of Christ is the source of our regeneration. The death of Christ terminated all the negative barriers between God and man, satisfying all the requirements of His righteousness, holiness, and glory. It also released the divine life from within the shell of Christ’s humanity. As a grain of wheat, He fell into the ground and died so that the divine life could be released to bear much fruit (John 12:24). This fruit was borne on the day of His resurrection through the regeneration of His many brothers. He is the Firstborn, and we are His many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Now both He and we can share in and acknowledge God the Father as our unique source (John 20:17; Heb. 2:12).

The intrinsic significance of the resurrection, as revealed in Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 1 Peter 1:3, is succinctly stated by Witness Lee:

Through His glorification in His resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son of God, possessing both divinity and humanity, and became the life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ, and regenerated all His believers to be God’s children, God’s species. (*Issue 22*)

Christ’s resurrection is not merely God’s raising Him from the dead...In this one divine act, God accomplished three big things. He begot not His only Son, but His firstborn Son; He begot His many sons in this one delivery; and He made this Jesus Christ, who had just been begotten of God, the life-giving Spirit. Three great accomplishments took place in one act...In the raising up of Christ, in this divine act, God accomplished three big things. He produced the firstborn Son, the many sons, and the life-giving Spirit. The entire economy of God is carried out by these three items. (Lee, *Practical* 34-35)

The full import of the resurrection ultimately relates to its role in the fulfillment of God’s eternal economy.

The ultimate goal of God’s economy is that He became a man that many of His chosen people might become God in the divine life and the divine nature, but not in the Godhead. Only God, no one else, is the unique object of our worship. (*Practical* 35)

In effect, resurrection pertains to deification. In a recent article in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, F. W. Norris speaks of deification with similar insight and circumspection.

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Patristic theologians offered a remarkable view of what some Protestants refer to as ‘restoration’ or ‘fellowship’. These theologians grounded it in a sense of Christian salvation: *theosis* or deification. Irenaeus spoke about the Son as ‘The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who because of his limitless love became what we are in order to make us what even he himself is.’ Athanasius was more succinct: ‘Christ became human that humans might become divine.’...Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas with different grace notes sang this song of sharing in the divine nature. Athanasius insisted that Christ was God not by participation but by his very nature as the only-begotten Son of God. Nazianzen, who also lauded deification, warned that Christ, the Son, was God in a way we would never be. He was God; we would share aspects of God. (412, 416-417)

Deification cannot be separated from the economy of God, and the economy of God is centered on processes of the all-inclusive Christ, including His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. Through incarnation, God became man in the person of Christ, and through resurrection man became God in the person of Christ. Equally as momentous, however, is the pivotal role of the resurrection in the deification of the believers.

### **Resurrection and Deification**

Based on Romans 1:3-4 it could be argued that any consideration of deification should be strictly limited to the humanity of Christ in His designation as the Son of God. The two remaining issues of Christ’s resurrection—Christ becoming a life-giving Spirit and the believers being regenerated unto a living hope—however, cannot be limited to Christ. In fact, both of these issues directly relate to the believers, and both are central to the process of deification. For the Protestant believer, however, the mere

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mention of the term *deification* often raises instant alarms and engenders equally instantaneous reactions, typically punctuated with charges of heresy and blasphemy. Out of respect for the sovereign majesty of God, there is a reluctance to even consider the great body of scholarship, both within the early church and even today<sup>1</sup> that does not shy so easily away from this deep and high revelation of God's economical purpose for man.

When viewed within the context of the processes of the all-inclusive Christ, it is possible to consider this truth in a context that is not so emotionally charged; nevertheless, there is still a need for revelation and enlightenment. One can objectively understand the calling of God to be the sovereign outworking of the election of a loving, yet righteous God, and in so doing, even offer up praise and gratitude. It is not possible, however, to objectively grasp what is the *hope* of our calling. For this, the Father of glory must give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, and the eyes of our heart must be enlightened so that we may "know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:17-18).

Deification is most often associated with Athanasius's statement that God became man so that man might become God.<sup>2</sup> This statement clearly reflects an understanding of the economy of God's salvation as it is centered in the person and work of Christ. When God was incarnated in the flesh, God became man. The flesh of Christ was, in fact, flesh. The apostle John is bold in his declaration that the Logos became flesh (John 1:14). The first step in the process of deification is so crucial that John later declares, "For many deceivers went out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist"

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(2 John 7). F. W. Norris illustrates the connection between incarnation and deification:

In ways similar to Irenaeus, Athanasius and Gregory the Theologian, he [Augustine] claimed that Christ the Son became human that humans might become divine. His point, not unlike some of the later words of Maximus and Gregory Palamas, was that humans could become divine because of God's gracious gift in Jesus Christ. Participation in God's nature became possible only through the incarnation of the Son. (420)

The step of God becoming man must be limited to the incarnation of the only begotten Son, the second of the Trinity, because this aspect of the process of deification assumes the a priori possession of divinity, something which was clearly beyond the grasp of humanity, even prior to the fall. Only One who existed in the form of God and who did not consider equality with God a treasure to be grasped could empty Himself, take the form of a slave, and become in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:6-7). The step of man becoming God, however, cannot be limited to the only Begotten, because in resurrection the only Begotten became the Firstborn among many brothers. This aspect of the process of deification assumes only a reconciliation between humanity and God which was fully accomplished by Christ on the cross. In *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation*, Christian D. Kettler, while commenting on the writings of T. F. Torrance, speaks of deification and its relation to the resurrection of Christ:

The "consummation" of salvation history as God taking on human flesh is seen in the resurrection and the ascension. In the ascension, humanity is taken up into the glory, presence, and life of God, and thus exalted by God precisely because our humanity is gathered into the humanity of the risen Christ. This is "the goal of the Incarnation." This does not mean that humanity is swallowed up into "the infinite ocean of the divine Being." This is guaranteed by the fact that Christ shares in our humanity as we share in his. (126)

Through the incarnation, God became man, and through the resurrection, it is possible for man to become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Much needs to be done to adequately develop our understanding of deification to help us overcome our hesitancy in discussing this aspect of the economy of God's salvation, not so that we can increase our theological knowledge, but so that we can begin to appropriate these experiences and advance toward the hope of our calling.

We must be willing to cautiously explore the implications of this high peak of the divine revelation. The first expression of caution must be an emphatic rejection of any claim that we are becoming God in the sense of the Godhead or as an

object for worship. We can proceed a little further in our exploration by asserting with equal emphasis that we are becoming God to the extent that we share in His divine life and partake of His divine nature. But at this point we tend to stop, uncertain about both our direction and the strength of our convictions. At the core of our reluctance to proceed further is a looming unease, not so much with the notion of man becoming God, but with our more elementary understandings of the Triune God Himself. Uncertain of our knowledge of God, we have little confidence to boldly declare that we are becoming God, especially when someone asks us to explain what we mean. While Athanasius certainly provided us with a catchy aphorism. For most of us, however, it is just a slogan, stirring though it may be. Perhaps our exploration of the implications of deification should begin not with humanity but with God Himself. If we can better understand God, perhaps we can better understand what it means to become God.

### Deification and Incorporation

Beginning in 1994, Witness Lee in his spoken ministry began to seriously address the matter of deification, terming it “the high peak of the divine revelation.” As such, the exploration of the truth of God becoming man so that man might become God became a central direction in his ministry. Approximately six months prior to his recent death, he introduced a new term to describe not only the process of deification but also the very Triune God Himself: incorporation. As the following outline attests, this term is enlightening.

- I. Through His glorification in His resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son of God, possessing both divinity and humanity, and became the life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ, and regenerated all His believers to be God’s children, God’s species.
- II. Through this all Christ’s believers have been brought into the union of life with the processed Triune God and mingled with the consummated God into an incorporation:
  - A. God in His Divine Trinity is an incorporation—John 14:10-11:
    1. By coinhering mutually—“I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”
    2. By working together as one—“The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.” “Believe... because of the works themselves.”
  - B. The consummated Triune God and the regenerated believers are an incorporation—vv. 16-19:

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1. The Spirit, the third of the Divine Trinity as another Comforter, being the reality of the Son, the second of the Divine Trinity as the first Comforter and the embodiment of the Triune God, does not only abide with the regenerated believers but also dwells in them—vv. 16-17.
2. The Son as the first Comforter left His believers through His death and came back to be another Comforter to them through His resurrection to make them live with Him—vv. 18-19.
- C. The consummated Triune God and the regenerated believers became an incorporation in the resurrection of Christ—v. 20:
  1. “In that day”—in the day of the Son’s resurrection.
  2. “You will know that”:
    - a. “I am in My Father”—the Son and the Father are incorporated into one.
    - b. “And you in Me”—the regenerated believers are incorporated into the Son and into the Father in the Son.
    - c. “And I in you”—the Son in the Father is incorporated into the regenerated believers.
  3. The *in* of the Spirit of reality in verse 17 is the totality of the three *ins* in verse 20. (*Issue* 19-20)

**T**his outline, in many respects, represents an entrance into a fuller understanding and appreciation of the Triune God and His economic plan for man. First John 3:2 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it

has not yet been manifested what we will be. We know that if He is manifested, we will be like Him because we will see Him even as He is." In the light of this outline, it is becoming clearer, for example, that *like* does not refer to likeness in an objective or physical sense, but rather in a sense that reflects our intrinsic relationship with the Triune God, one that mirrors the relationships of mutual coinherence within the Trinity. We will be like Him because we will know that the Son is in the Father, that we are in the Son, and that the Son is in us.

If we view the Triune God as an incorporation, then deification is not some nebulous move toward the "divine," but the progressive realization of the intrinsic relationship of coinherence that was initiated between God and man on the day of the Lord's resurrection. This relationship began with our regeneration unto a living hope, and it is sustained and nurtured by the life-giving Spirit. Through the resurrection of Christ, we, as the children of God, possess the life and nature of God through our union in life with the processed Triune God. The ultimate significance of the resurrection of Christ is the incorporation of the processed Triune God with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect. Deification is but the progressive realization of this incorporation.

### Witnessing of the Resurrection

In order for this progressive realization to occur, there is a need for a continuing witness of the resurrection of Christ. This witness should not be limited to the objective fact, the historicity, of Christ's resurrection but should also emphasize the intrinsic significance of the resurrection. When the God-man, Jesus Christ, was raised from the dead with a body of flesh and bones, He was designated the Son of God in His humanity, and He was transfigured to become the life-giving Spirit. In the resurrection of Christ, we, the believers in Christ, were regenerated by God to become the children of God possessing the life and nature of God. In His resurrection Christ was glorified by the Father with the divine glory, and the issue of this glorification was the incorporation of the regenerated believers with the processed God to become an enlarged, universal, divine and human incorporation for the eternal expression of the Triune

IF WE VIEW THE TRIUNE GOD AS AN INCORPORATION, THEN DEIFICATION IS NOT SOME NEBULOUS MOVE TOWARD THE "DIVINE," BUT THE PROGRESSIVE REALIZATION OF THE INTRINSIC RELATIONSHIP OF COINHERENCE THAT WAS INITIATED BETWEEN GOD AND MAN ON THE DAY OF THE LORD'S RESURRECTION.

God. "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:32). [4C]

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Since deification is rarely discussed in Western, particularly Protestant, theology, many believers assume that it is without scriptural precedent and thus has been universally rejected by their fellow believers in Christ. This, however, is not the case. The concept is still so fundamentally accepted within the Eastern branches of Christianity that there has never been a time in which *deification* was not regarded as the goal of Christian existence. Within the Eastern Orthodox Church the term *deification* is synonymous with the term *salvation*.

<sup>2</sup>Kettler, in commenting on Athanasius's contribution, draws the following observation from Torrance:

This is particularly interesting when we remember that Athanasius is usually remembered as the great champion of the deity of Christ. But instead of overreacting to the Arians' emphasis on the human aspects of the incarnate Christ, Athanasius turned the tables by stressing the high priestly ministry of Christ. Christ not only ministered the things of God to man, but also ministered the things of humanity to God. (121-122)

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