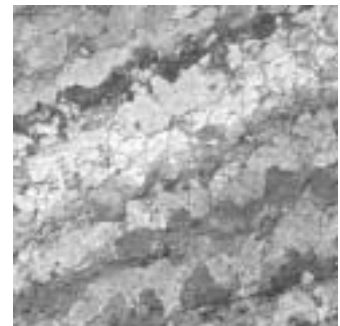
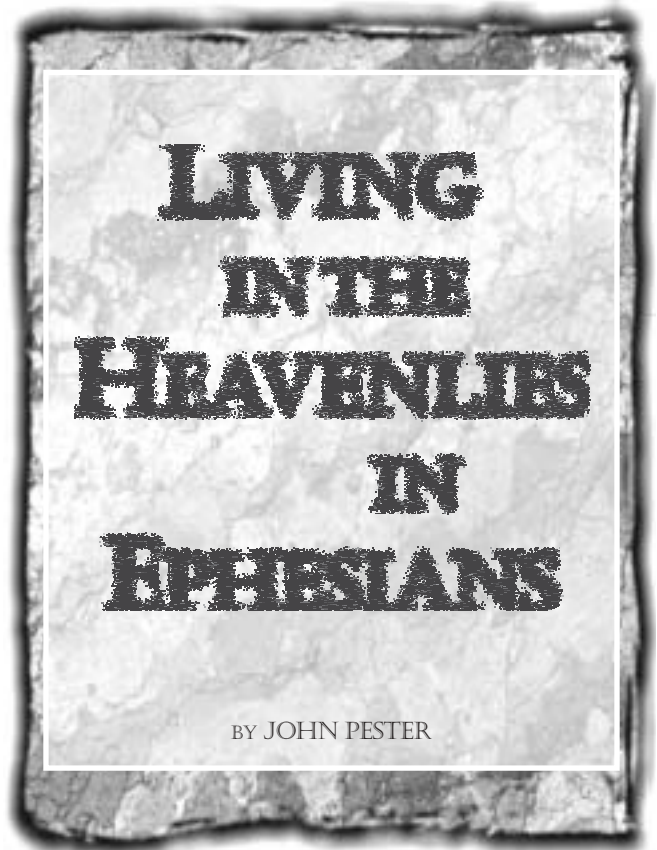


Any challenge to the idea of “heavenly mansions,” even one that is in full accord with the scriptural revelation of God’s economical interaction with humanity, is likely to elicit a strong response in defense of a physical interpretation of the New Jerusalem. Addressing the concerns behind such a defense is ultimately what is of interest in this article. It could be argued that centuries of cultural references to the idea of heaven have so shaped the Christian mind that it would be naive not to expect a vigorous rebuttal to our assertion that physical mansions are not waiting for us in heaven. While the pervasive influence of cultural norms cannot be denied, these norms influence both believers and unbelievers alike. It is not uncommon, for example, for atheists to lapse into language that associates the destiny of a departed loved one with a “better place,” even if they hesitate to identify this place with the Christian notion of a heavenly mansion.

It also could be argued that such a defense is rooted in a certain venal umbrage over the prospective loss of wealth in heaven, especially since there is ample evidence that Christian teachers increasingly are willing to pander to these base instincts (2 Tim. 3:5). The promise of wealth in heaven, however, does not have universal appeal to all Christians. Many Christians are repulsed by such representations, especially when they consider them in the light of the charge to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, denying both ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12). Such an argument, therefore, could not account for the deep concern that all Christians may experience when confronting the possibility that heaven, as it is commonly understood, is nothing more than a fictive idea.

It has been suggested by Jacques Monod<sup>1</sup>, when discussing ideas as epistemological constructs, that the spreading power of any idea is a function of its ability to “*explain* man by assigning him his place in an immanent destiny, in whose bosom his anxiety dissolves” (166). Certainly heaven, as it is commonly understood by Christians, is an idea with demonstrated spreading power. It is an idea in which many anxieties dissolve, including the anxiety that comes from deprivation, the anxiety that is generated by pain, suffering, and isolation, and the anxiety that ever-looms in the form of death. When considered in this context, the Christian notion of a heavenly mansion can best be understood as a representation of hope itself. With the hope of a heavenly mansion, all of our anxieties dissolve and immanent meaning can be assigned to the Christian message of redemption and salvation. To challenge this commonly held notion seemingly deprives us of hope and forces us back into the quagmire of corrupted anxieties that we escaped by believing in the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 2:20). Our challenge, however, is not intended to strip the Christian message of its inherent hopefulness, but rather to redirect the eyes of our heart so that we would really know and participate in the hope of our calling in this age.<sup>2</sup>

In Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians numerous references are made to *the heavenlies* and



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*the heavens.*<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the hope of our calling often is associated with going to heaven.<sup>4</sup> Paul's vantage point in Ephesians, however, is principally spiritual. We have been blessed with spiritual blessings, not physical blessings. As such, the living that issues from our experience of these spiritual blessing bears a heavenly characteristic.

*Heavenlies* here indicates not only the heavenly place but also the heavenly nature, state, characteristic, and atmosphere of the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us. These blessings are from the heavens, having a heavenly nature, heavenly state, heavenly characteristic, and heavenly atmosphere. The believers in Christ are enjoying on earth these heavenly blessings, which are spiritual as well as heavenly. They are different from the blessings with which God blessed Israel. Those blessings were physical and earthly. The blessings bestowed on us are of God the Father, in God the Son, through God the Spirit, and in the heavenlies. They are the spiritual blessings bestowed by the Triune God on us, the believers in Christ. They are the blessings in the heavenlies, having a heavenly nature, state, character, and atmosphere. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:3, note 8)

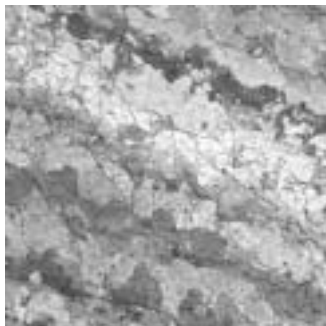
The heavenly Jerusalem (Heb.12:22), the New Jerusalem, is the consummate characterization of our spiritual blessings in Christ, and its symbolic details in Revelation 21 and 22 are richly reflected in the living that Paul unveils throughout Ephesians. If, however, our view of heaven is bounded by physicality and the New Jerusalem is regarded as the epitome of physical rewards, then there is no meaningful or even logical correlation between the spiritual blessings in Ephesians and the New Jerusalem as a physical city in Revelation 21 and 22. To live according to a traditional understanding of heaven is to lose sight of the spiritual blessings that Paul presents in Ephesians. It is to walk, in principle, as the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of the mind (4:17). To enter into the living that Paul presents in Ephesians, however, is to live in hope, even to live in the God of hope (Rom. 15:13).

THE NEW JERUSALEM,  
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### Seeing the New Jerusalem in Ephesians

The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22 is the consummate sign of our living in and with the Triune God; it is the full development of God's eternal plan which is first unveiled in Genesis 1 and 2. All of the details in the first two chapters of the Bible—the Triune God, the tripartite man, the divine life, and the building of a divine counterpart—are present in the final two chapters of the Bible. These details, like seeds, grow and develop throughout the intervening verses, chapters, books, and testaments of the divine revelation. With the eyes of our heart being enlightened, it is possible to see the details of the New Jerusalem in Ephesians. In fact, there is a strong correlation between Ephesians and Revelation because there is an element of eternity in each of these books. Ephesians encompasses a span of divine activity that begins in eternity past and moves forward into eternity future. As such, it covers the grand sweep of God's eternal purpose, both in its declaration in Genesis 1 and 2 and in its consummation in Revelation 21 and 22.

**W**ith the initiation of His creative acts in Genesis 1:1, the Triune God entered into time. He declared and demonstrated His purpose by forming humanity in His image and according to His likeness and by building a counterpart in life and nature for man (1:26; 2:22-23). Ephesians begins with a glimpse of God's heart in eternity past and shows us the motivation for His creative acts. According to the good pleasure of His will, God the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (1:4), predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ (v. 5). The Triune God's declaration concerning image and dominion in Genesis 1:26 is but the speaking forth in time of His eternal desire to have many sons who are conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Ephesians then reveals that a counterpart for Christ is being built up through the dispensing of the divine life into these predestinated sons, the members of His Body (5:29-31).



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Ephesians also speaks of our movement into eternity future, the same future that is revealed in the final chapters of Revelation. The economy of God, which is the dispensing of God in His Trinity into His chosen and redeemed elect, produces the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:10; 3:9; 1:23). This is the consummation of God's desire for image. The economy of God also brings in the fullness of the times in which all things will be headed up in Christ (1:10). This is the consummation of God's desire for dominion. The fullness of the times marks the completion of the time that remains in this current age of grace and in the coming age of the millennial kingdom. At the fullness of the times, there will be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever (3:21), as both God and His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect enter into eternity future.

Since both Ephesians and Revelation speak of eternity future, there must be a correspondence between their revealed visions. The eternity future of Ephesians is divine, mystical, and ultimately organic, and it is our contention that the New Jerusalem is a sign of a divine, mystical, and organic constitution of God in man and man in God. If the New Jerusalem is merely a physical city, then two contradictory, rather than complementary, visions of eternity are presented in the Bible. Two competing visions of eternity call into question the internal consistency of the divine revelation and undermine our faith in its inspired infallibility. But is this not—the undermining of faith in God's Word—one of the principal functions of leaven? And if a physical notion of heaven undermines our objective faith, it certainly undermines our subjective faith, the moment-by-moment operation of the Spirit in our spirit.

In order to enter into the spiritual realities in Ephesians, we must see the New Jerusalem for what it really is—a consummate and detailed sign of the fulfillment of God's economy. The details of this marvelous sign in Revelation are present in Ephesians. Rather than waiting to go to heaven, we have an opportunity to experience and live out the details of the New Jerusalem today. A heavenly living is available to us now (2:13; 3:5, 10; 5:8). Purging out the leaven of heaven need not return us to a quagmire of anxieties; instead, it will enable us to embark upon a living that fulfills the hope of our calling and brings in the fullness of the times, the completion of God's economical interaction with humanity.

### Living Out the New Jerusalem in Ephesians

The details of the New Jerusalem are not difficult to identify, even if an understanding of their significance escapes many. These details can be summarized in the following descriptors: *bride, holy, city, glory, wall, gates, foundations, square, gold, precious stones, pearl, temple, light, river, throne, street, and tree*. Like growing seeds, these details are vibrantly presented in the book of Ephesians and interwoven in Paul's description of a living that is immediate, organic, and ultimately corporate.

#### *Bride: Being Organically Joined to Christ through Faith*

When John was carried away in spirit to a great and high mountain to see the final vision in the book of Revelation, the vision of the New Jerusalem, an angel said, "Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). Just as the counterpart for Adam was out from Adam (Gen. 2:22), part of Adam (v. 23), and even identified as Adam (5:2), the church, as the organic counterpart of Christ is out from Christ (Eph. 5:25), part of Christ (v. 30), and even identified as Christ (vv. 29, 31; 1 Cor. 12:12). To live in the heavenlies in Ephesians, first and foremost, is to live in an organic union with Christ. All of the blessings in Ephesians and all of the details of the New Jerusalem in Revelation issue forth from this organic union.

We are organically joined to Christ because we have received the divine life of God

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through faith. Before we heard the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation, (Eph. 1:13), we were alienated from the life of God (4:18). Because of His rich mercy and great love, however, we were made *alive* together with Christ (2:4-5). In addition to God's judicial acceptance of us based on Christ's substitutionary death on the cross, our salvation includes the release and impartation of God's divine life. The divine life that was concealed within the shell of Christ's humanity was released through His death and imparted through His resurrection into those whom God had predestinated unto sonship. In a divine and mystical process, we were regenerated unto a living hope through Christ's resurrection from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). In resurrection the life of God regenerated His many sons. By virtue of this life and of our union with Christ in this life (1 John 5:12), we can experience God's full salvation in life (Rom. 5:10).

Our salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). This grace is Christ, and the faith through which we receive grace is the faith of Christ. Faith brings us into an organic union with Christ; it is the means and the proof of our salvation in life.

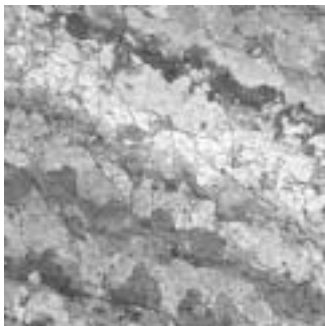
Faith has an object, and it issues from its object. This object is Jesus, who is God incarnate. When man hears Him, knows Him, appreciates Him, and treasures Him, He causes faith to be generated in man, enabling man to believe in Him. Thus, He becomes the faith in man by which man believes in Him. Hence, this faith becomes the faith in Him, and it is also the faith that belongs to Him. (Recovery Version, Rom. 3:22, note 1)

**T**he organic union that we enjoy with Christ makes us His counterpart in life and nature. We have been joined to the Lord, and we are one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). There is a surpassing greatness of power toward us who *believe* (Eph. 1:19). This power, which operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him in the heavenlies, subdues all of the negative things that hinder us from being headed up in Christ and imparts all of the positive things in God that will constitute us to be His very fullness, His organic Body (vv. 20-23). Faith is a dynamic operation in the divine life that initiates and sustains our organic union with the Triune God. If the believing that Paul speaks of in verse 19 is mere mental assent, then there should be much evidence of the divine operation of God's power, much manifestation of Christ's lordship, and much practical expression of the church as the Body of Christ. There is little evidence of these realities in today's Christianity, however, because the vast majority of Christians are passively waiting for a physical reward that will never materialize. In their acceptance of the idea of heaven, they subvert their status as believers so that they neither know nor experience the reality of their organic union with the Triune God. The eyes of our heart need to be enlightened (v. 18). We should not waste time longing for the "sweet by and by"; rather, we should redeem the time by allowing Christ to make His home in our hearts through faith (5:16; 3:17). It is our unique privilege to live according to the operation of the divine life in this age, and it is only this economical operation that will prepare and adorn us to stand as a bride, holy and without blemish, before Him in love.

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*Holy: Being Sanctified by the Washing of the Water in the Word*

The bride that Christ presents to Himself is holy and without blemish (5:27), and the second detail of the New Jerusalem that is emphasized in Revelation 21:9-10 is holiness: "And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city." When John was taken to see the bride, he was shown a holy city, which signifies that holiness is an essential element of Christ's organic counterpart. The church is inwardly constituted with God's holy nature, and it outwardly expresses God's holy nature. The Triune God is holy; He is separate and unique from everything (4:8; 15:4). When we enjoy our organic union with Him through faith, we partake of His holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4) because His nature cannot be separated from His person. When we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise (Eph. 1:13), the process of adorning us as the bride, the holy city, began.



**A** holy living in the heavenlies involves the process of sanctifying our whole being, including our spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Our spirit was sanctified at the moment of our regeneration, and our body will be sanctified when it is redeemed at the coming of the Lord (Eph. 1:14; 4:30). The sanctification of our soul, however, is a matter for today. In this age of grace God affords us an opportunity to be cleansed from every defiling thing and to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). The sanctification of our soul involves “a transformation from the natural disposition to a spiritual one by Christ as the life-giving Spirit saturating all the inward parts of our being with God’s nature of holiness” (Recovery Version, Rom. 6:19, note 2). Sanctification is accomplished by the flowing of the divine life as water in the word (Eph. 5:26).<sup>5</sup> The dispensing of the divine life sanctifies our entire being, removes spots, wrinkles, and blemishes, and progressively adorns us as a bride through the impartation of God’s holy nature.

The washing of the water here [in Ephesians 5:26] is different from the washing of the redeeming blood of Christ. The redeeming blood washes away our sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14), whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as the “spot or wrinkle or any such things” mentioned in v. 27. In separating and sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood (Heb. 13:12) and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. We are now in such a washing process, that the church may be holy and without blemish (v. 27). (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:26, note 3)

The holy city comes out of a sanctified living that bears the nature and characteristic of holiness. This is not accomplished in the future, but in our living today. When eternity future begins, the New Jerusalem *is* adorned and prepared as a bride (Rev. 21:2); it is fully sanctified in God’s holy nature. Spots and wrinkles can be removed only in the age of grace or in the millennial kingdom.<sup>6</sup> By emphasizing a living that is under the nourishing and cherishing care of our gracious Christ, Ephesians 5 shows us that the bride’s preparation and adornment through sanctification is a matter for our living today; it is not something we should ignore and blithely assume will occur at some point in the future. This is the time to deal with spots and wrinkles, and the divine life in the word has the power and capacity to enable us to stand, holy and without blemish, before our Husband in love (1:4).

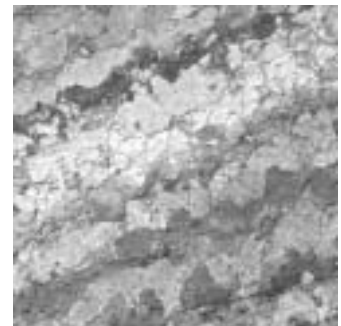
#### *City: Being Built into a Dwelling Place of God*

As an organic counterpart who is constituted with His holy nature, the church is also God’s place of rest. In significance, it is a dwelling place, a city; in reality, it is a mutual abode. The third descriptor of the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of God’s economy—*city*—corresponds to this reality: “And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city” (Rev. 21:10). Contrary to fallen notions, no construction is occurring in heaven, and the Lord is not laboring as a carpenter in heaven. Instead, the building of God’s dwelling place is now occurring in our hearts, primarily through the sanctification of our soul. A living that truly bears the characteristic of being from above comes from letting Christ make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). Rather than waiting to go to heaven to enter into a finite, physical building, we need to let the divine life grow in us. As this life spreads throughout our mind, emotion, and will through His abiding words, we are becoming the dwelling place of God (2:22). God finds His ultimate rest in redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and built up humanity (Isa. 66:1-2). In such a mutual dwelling of God in man and man in God, there is more glory than any physical mansion could ever presume to manifest.

#### *Glory: Being Constituted for Expression through the Enjoyment of Grace*

The church’s organic union with the Triune God and its constitution with His holy nature

EPHESIANS 5 SHOWS US THAT THE BRIDE’S PREPARATION AND ADORNMENT THROUGH SANCTIFICATION IS A MATTER FOR OUR LIVING TODAY; IT IS NOT SOMETHING WE SHOULD IGNORE AND BLITHELY ASSUME WILL OCCUR AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE.



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are the basis for the mutual indwelling of God and man. Out from this mutual indwelling, the Triune God will be fully expressed throughout eternity. Consequently, the holy city in Revelation 21:10 is described as “having the glory of God” in verse 11. The glory of God is intrinsically related to grace in the book of Ephesians. In fact, it is the believers’ experience of the Triune God as grace that produces the glory of the Triune God.

According to the good pleasure of His will, God the Father determined in eternity past that we would be to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:6). And He caused the riches of this grace to abound to us in His Beloved, God the Son.<sup>7</sup> The riches of this grace ultimately are applied through the sealing and pledging of God the Spirit (vv. 13-14). Ephesians 1 reveals that the Triune God has passed through a process of incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension to dispense Himself in His Trinity into the believers as grace.<sup>8</sup> This dispensing ushers in the fullness of the times and produces a universal display of His grace in glory (v. 10). “Glory is God expressed (Exo. 40:34). *The glory of His grace* indicates that God’s grace, which is Himself as our enjoyment, expresses Him” (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:6, note 2).

The glory of the holy city expresses God and shines out “like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal” (Rev. 21:11). The appearance of the One on the throne is like a jasper stone, and the river that flows out from the throne is bright as crystal (4:2-3; 22:1). Thus the descriptions of God match the descriptions of the glory that shines out of the holy city. Our enjoyment of grace will constitute us with the Triune God to the point that His glory, His expression, will shine out from us and elicit universal praise for His multifarious wisdom (Eph. 3:10). Rather than enjoying the grace that has been given to us (4:7), the dream of going to heaven causes many believers to become sleepers who are passive in their pursuit of Christ and ill-equipped to function as members of the Body of Christ (5:14; 4:14).

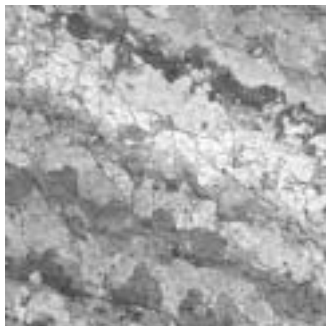
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*Wall: Being Separated unto God by Being Renewed in the Divine Life*

To function as a member in the Body of Christ, there is a need for separation unto God by being renewed in the divine life. This need for separation can be seen in the fifth detail of the New Jerusalem: “It had a great and high wall” (Rev. 21:12). “The wall is for separation and protection. New Jerusalem will be absolutely separated unto God and will fully protect the interests of God. Its wall will be great and high. Today all believers need such a great and high wall for their separation and protection” (Recovery Version, note 1). The separation that we need does not come from self-imposed guidelines for conduct; it comes from living in the reality of the new man that was created in Christ on the cross. As believers we have the capacity to put off our former manner of life, the old man, and put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality (Eph. 4:22, 24). In baptism, we put on the new man, and a wall of separation from our former manner of living is established.

Baptism is not a form or a ritual; it signifies our identification with Christ. Through baptism we are immersed into Christ, taking Him as our realm, that we may be united with Him as one in His death and resurrection. We were born in the sphere of Adam, the first man (1 Cor. 15:45, 47), but through baptism we have been transferred into the sphere of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:27), the second man (1 Cor. 15:47). When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death. His death has separated us from the world and the satanic power of darkness and has terminated our natural life, our old nature, our self, our flesh, and even our entire history. (Recovery Version, Rom. 6:3, notes 1-3)

As believers we need to live in the reality of our baptism by walking in newness of life (v. 4). Such a living puts off the lie, speaks truth, and does not give place to the devil.



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As such, it fully protects God's interests for the building up of the Body (Eph. 4:25, 27, 29). To forsake this heavenly aspect of our living is to walk as the Gentiles walk and to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (vv. 17, 30). How many Christians, however, who have been taught that believing in the Lord is all that is needed in order to go to heaven, are living lives that are indistinguishable from the Gentiles, lives that are full of bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, evil speaking, malice, fornication, uncleanness, greediness, obscenity, foolish talking, and sly, filthy jesting (vv. 31; 5:3-4)? We need to have a living that projects a great and high wall, a wall that is constructed and maintained by the operation of the divine life that we received in Christ.

### *Gates: Being Brought into the Triune God*

The operation of the economy of the Triune God brings us into the Triune God, who is both our entrance into the holy city and the city itself. The sixth detail of the New Jerusalem is the gates. It has twelve gates: "On the east three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates" (Rev. 21:13). *Three gates* signify that the Triune God is our entrance into the mutual abode of God in man and man in God. Living in the heavenlies is a matter of organic access through and into the Triune God. Ephesians 2:18 says, "Through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." The word *both* refers to those of the circumcision and those of the uncircumcision (v. 11). In God's eyes there are only two categories of people in the world, Jews and Gentiles, and in Christ, both have access unto the Father. Thus, God's salvation is available to all men.

The gates on the four sides face the four directions of the earth, signifying that the entrance into the holy city is available to all the peoples on earth. (Cf. the four heads of the river in Gen. 2:10-14.) That there are three gates on each side signifies that the three of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—work together to bring people into the holy city. This is indicated in the three parables in Luke 15 and implied in the Lord's word in Matt. 28:19. To be baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is the real entrance into the holy city. That there are three gates on each of the four sides, three times four being twelve, also implies that the Triune God is mingled with man, the creature. (Recovery Version, Rev. 21:13, note 1)

**T**o live in the heavenlies is not to pass through pearly gates, but to be joined to God in His economy and to be mingled with God as a member of His household, thus producing a mutual abode for God and man (Eph. 2:19). This mutual abode is characterized by mingling and coinherence, because we are growing in the Lord, and God is dwelling in us (vv. 21-22). In verse 22 Paul speaks of the believers "being built together into a dwelling place," indicating that this should be our experience today.

### *Foundations: Being Built Up according to the Apostles' Teaching*

In order for us to experience the economy of God, the truth of His economy, which is the content of the apostles' teaching (1 Tim. 1:3-4), must be spoken. The foundation of the believers' experience of God's economy is the apostles' teaching. This is the significance of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem bearing the names of the twelve apostles: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). The apostles' teaching is the entire contents of the New Testament concerning the economy of God, which is the dispensing of the Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people to produce the organic Body of Christ as His eternal expression. Paul received a revelation of this mystery in his regenerated spirit; he was commissioned to enlighten all concerning the economy of the mystery; and he humbly asked the saints to pray that utterance would be given to him to make known this mystery (Eph. 3:3-5, 9; 6:19). When the revelation of the mystery is properly proclaimed, God is able to establish and build up the

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believers according to the true contents of the gospel (Rom. 16:25). When only the leavened gospel of heaven is proclaimed, however, little ground is given to God to establish and build up the Body of Christ.

Without a proper understanding and declaration of the apostles' teaching, there is little faith to substantiate the building up of the Body of Christ. In order to believe, however, we must hear, and in order to hear, some must speak (Rom. 10:14-15). With only the leavened teaching of heaven being spoken of in today's Christianity, it is not surprising that Paul's words in Ephesians do not resonate in our experience. It is a shame that many teachers of the Word who know, at least in part, that the common understanding of heaven is false perpetuate this fantasy out of a fear of dashing the hopes of the Lord's children. It is time for some who know better to take a stand for the truth. God's dwelling cannot be built with the leavened teaching of heaven; we must take heed how we build upon the foundation of the apostles' teaching (1 Cor. 3:10-15; Eph. 2:20).

*Square: Being Balanced in Our Experience of Christ*

Without the proper foundation of the apostles' teaching, any experience of Christ will become peculiar and unbalanced. Our experience of Christ should be equal in its breadth, length, height, and depth; that is, our experience of Christ should encompass the full extent of His balanced dimensions, not just one aspect that is carried to an extreme. The measure of balance in and fullness of our experience of Christ is determined by the extent to which we are built up in the Body of Christ; it is the measure of our corporate apprehension of Christ. Ephesians 3:18 defines the scope of our experience of Christ as "the breadth and length and height and depth," and the New Jerusalem exhibits this same proportionality. It is a three dimensional square: "And the city lies square, and its length is as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed to a length of twelve thousand stadia; the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal" (Rev. 21:16). The proper experience of Christ comes from being built with all the saints. When we are built with all the saints, there is a balanced apprehension of all the dimensions of Christ. The Body is our safeguard from any extremes. In the organic Body the breadth always equals the length which, in turn, equals the height and depth.

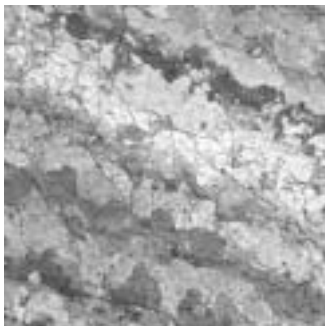
Without the balance that comes from being built up with all the believers, it is quite easy to become a one-dimensional Christian; that is, it is quite easy to stress an experience or practice to the exclusion of all others. Rather than receiving the believers in love, requirements of conformity in minor matters of the truth often are placed upon the believers.<sup>9</sup> Conformity to certain practices also serves as the basis for excluding believers with callous indifference to the fact that they have been received by God (Rom. 14:3). Every denomination, in principle, is a reflection of imbalance in the Body. Even if an experience or minor truth is revealed in the Bible, it should not be emphasized to the point that it becomes a catalyst for division and separation.

**T**he balance that saves us from every manifestation of division is increased and maintained when the members of the organic Body of Christ begin to function according to "the operation in the measure of each one part" (Eph. 4:16). In the Body there are many members, each with different but necessary functions (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:21-22). As members of the Body of Christ, we are members individually and individually members one of another (Eph. 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5). The reality of a living in the heavenlies is a balanced living in the Body of Christ.

*Gold, Precious Stones, and Pearl: Being Deified in the Economy of God*

The Body of Christ is just Christ. It is God in life and nature but not in the Godhead and not as an object to be worshipped. Ephesians reveals that the economy of God is a

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process of deification, and Revelation reveals that the consummation of God's economy is the dwelling of God in man and man in God. This is signified by the New Jerusalem, which is composed entirely of materials that speak of the person and work of the Triune God—gold, precious stones, and pearl: “And the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone....And the twelve gates were twelve pearls” (21:18-19, 21).<sup>10</sup> What is so precious about Paul's presentation of the economy of God in Ephesians is his perspective. He does not present deification as a possibility but as an accomplished fact. To indicate that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ is to indicate that our deification is a certainty in the eyes of God. It is as certain as the Father's choosing and predestinating, as certain as the Son's redemption and abounding riches, and as certain as the Spirit's sealing and pledging. There is no doubt in Paul's mind that man is becoming God through a process of God's dispensing of Himself into man.

**T**his process is possible only because God became a man. Without Christ's incarnation, without His becoming flesh and subsequently shedding His blood on the cross, man would forever remain apart from Christ and alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). In His death we were reconciled to God, and in His coming as the Spirit, even as the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, peace was imparted and access into God was granted (2:16-18). Now it is possible for man—who apart from Christ, was dead in offenses and sins—to be made alive (2:1, 5), to be sanctified in life (5:26), to grow in life (2:21; 4:13, 15-16), to walk in the reality of life (vv. 17, 21), to be renewed in life (v. 23), and to imitate God, not outwardly but in life (5:1), being fully incorporated into the living, organic Body of Christ (v. 30). The new man is the New Jerusalem, an organic, corporate person, possessing God's divinity, as signified by gold, and also possessing redeemed, regenerated, and transformed humanity, as signified by precious stones, both of which issue forth from Christ's life-releasing death and life-imparting resurrection, as signified by pearl. Our deification is certain because the purpose and plan of our God, the economy of God, is being carried out by our purposeful God. Our only responsibility is to allow this economy to operate in us and to build us up in the divine life.

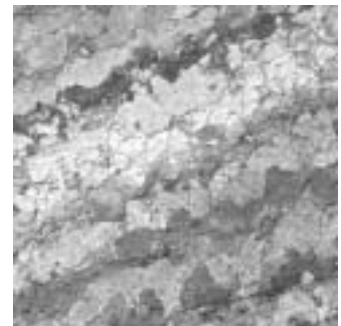
*Temple: Being Incorporated into the Triune God through the Growth of the Divine Life*

In a heavenly living, there is growth in the divine life that progressively incorporates the believers into the Triune God, who becomes our dwelling place, our temple. Incorporation is based upon the principle of coinherence, which is spoken of in John 14:9-11. This is the eternal coinherence that exists within the Godhead. The coinherence of the Triune God and His chosen elect is spoken of also in John 14:20. The believers' incorporation into the Triune God results in the mutual dwelling of God in man and man in God. This heavenly detail is signified by the lack of a physical temple in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:22: “And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” The New Jerusalem is a living temple. Just as the Holy of Holies was square, the New Jerusalem is square, an enlarged and living temple in whom we can dwell.

This inner temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb, signifying that God and the Lamb Themselves will be the place in which we serve God. The holy city as the tabernacle of God is for God to dwell in, and God and the Lamb as the temple are for the redeemed saints to dwell in. In the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem will be a mutual dwelling place for God and man for eternity. (Recovery Version, Rev. 21:22, note 2)

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, the New Jerusalem is a corporate person; it is God yet man and man yet God. This process of growth unto incorporation is fully revealed in Ephesians where Paul speaks of the church as “growing into a holy temple in the Lord”

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(2:21). The church's ultimate identity will be indistinguishable from Christ in relation to life, nature, and expression. When the church grows, it grows up into Christ (4:15); it bears the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 13); and it expresses the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:23). The church, which is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, is also a temple for God. In speaking to the believers in Corinth, Paul asks, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). And as the church grows, it is built together into a dwelling place of God. This incorporation is the spontaneous issue of the growth of the divine life that has been imparted into the members of the Body.

*Light: Being Enlightened in the Divine Life*

When speaking of the divine life in Christ, the apostle John says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). When speaking of the divine life in the enlarged Christ, the city-temple, the New Jerusalem, the apostle again speaks of light: "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light....There will be no night there" (Rev. 21:23-25). The New Jerusalem is a city of life and a city of light. The life of God always brings in light because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

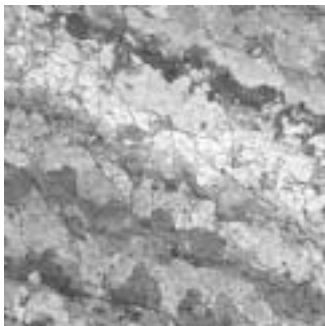
**A** living in the heavenlies is a living that is full of the shining and enlightenment of life which, in turn, produces a full expression of the divine life. According to Paul, when we were dead in our offenses and sins, we were not only darkened in our understanding; the very constitution of our nature was darkness (Eph. 4:18; 5:8). The impartation of the divine life into fallen man, however, brings in the shining of the true light into the world (John 1:9). This light enlightens every man, and the darkness cannot overcome it (v. 5). As a consequence we are now light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). Even though we are children of light (v. 8), there still is a need for the eyes of our heart to be enlightened (1:18). Our need for light corresponds to our need for sanctification. We need to be enlightened by the Father of glory, the Father of lights, to see the hope of our calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the operation of His divine power in His divine economy (vv. 17-19; James 1:17; Eph. 3:9). With an enlightened heart, we have a way to fully enter into God's economy and to walk in light and ultimately bear the fruit of the light. The fruit of the light is the Father as our goodness (Matt. 19:17), the Son as our righteousness (Rom. 5:17-18, 21), and the Spirit as our truth and reality (John 14:17). As children of light who walk in light, we ultimately reproduce our begetting Triune God who is full of light. The light of the holy city is the light that corporately will be shining out of God in man and man in God for eternity.

Even though it has not fully been manifested what we will be (1 John 3:2), we now have God as both life and light. This is the time for Christ to shine on us to deliver us from every unfruitful work of darkness (Eph. 5:14, 11). To be asleep to the matters of God's economy is a sign of darkness, and the teaching of heaven only produces sleep in God's children. With heaven as a "guarantee," how many Christians have been lulled back to their former manner of living? How many of those who have been made alive together with Christ still need to arise from the dead in their practical daily living? With heaven, genuine hope is destroyed, and there is only an enticement to engage in vain, even lascivious, imaginations. Heaven destroys light, and without a vision, the Lord's people perish.

*River, Throne, and Street: Being Headed Up through God's Unique Way of Dispensing*

The fact that Paul compares the believers to sleepers in Ephesians 5:14 is an indication of our daily need to be headed up in Christ through the dispensing of the divine life. This aspect of a heavenly living is the most prominent feature in the New Jerusalem,

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which is signified by the details of a river, a throne, and street: “And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street” (Rev. 22:1). God’s unique way of interacting with humanity is His economy. His economy is centered on Christ and comes to us through Christ; He is the divine way, the divine street that we must walk.

That the river of water of life proceeds “in the middle of its street” signifies that the divine life flows in the divine nature as the unique way for the daily life of God’s redeemed people. Where the divine life flows, there the divine nature is as the holy way by which God’s people walk; and where the holy way of the divine nature is, there the divine life is flowing. The divine life and the divine nature as the holy way always go together. Thus, God’s river of water of life is available along this divine way, and we enjoy the river by walking in this way of life. (Recovery Version, Rev. 22:1, note 6)

As God’s way, Christ is the channel through which everything comes into being. Apart from Christ, God cannot dispense and impart Himself into man, and man cannot be built up to be a dwelling place for God. The river of God’s dispensing grace comes to us through Christ as the life-giving Spirit. He is the river that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. When this river of water of life flows, it comes from the throne and conveys the throne; that is, there is an economy to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10).

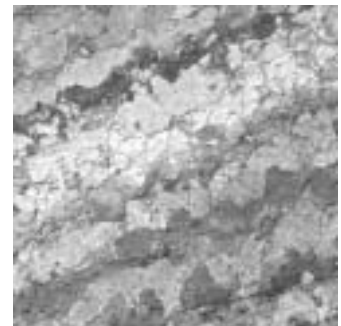
**T**he building up of the Body of Christ comes out of being headed up in Christ. If our daily living is to have any eternal weight and purpose, it must be a living that is under the headship of Christ and that even produces Christ as the Head. We need to hold Christ as our Head, out from whom all the Body grows (Col. 2:19), and as the Body grows, it grows up into Christ as the Head and builds itself up in love through the operation in the measure of each one part (Eph. 4:15-16). The operation in the measure of each one part is an indication of heading up because it shows that the members of the Body, each with their particular and necessary function, are supplying life to the Body according to the measure with which they have been measured (2 Cor. 10:13, 15).

Too many Christians are waiting to walk on a golden street in the future but are not walking in Christ and in the flowing of the Spirit today. Too many Christians are hoping to reign with Christ on a physical throne in heaven but exhibit no signs of being headed up in Christ on earth. Too many Christians are partaking of the unfruitful works of darkness instead of partaking in God’s unique and eternal economy. And too many Christians are living for themselves and for their “ministries” instead of living in the Body and for the Body. Is this not a leavened lump? We should not so easily exchange God’s unique way in His economy for the fantasy of heaven. To do so is to forfeit our birthright of the supply of grace in this age and the next in the Body of Christ.

*Tree: Being Supplied in the Body and Being a Supply to the Body*

The last detail in the consummate sign of God’s eternal economy is the tree of life, signifying that God in Christ is continuously supplying Himself in His economy to His Body. “And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month” (Rev. 22:2). The tree of life that bears fruit for our daily enjoyment is the vine that is supplying the branches in John 15. A heavenly living involves being supplied with the divine life in the Body, and it also involves being a supply to the members of the Body. Perhaps the highest expression of a heavenly living is seen in Ephesians 4:16, where Paul speaks of the organic operation of God’s economy in the building up of the Body of Christ: “Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich

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supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.” In God’s economy, the members of the Body receive Christ and impart Christ to the other members. And in the receiving and supplying, the Body of Christ is built up for God’s expression. This is the fellowship of the Body in the divine life.

**W**hile much is made of receiving material blessings in this age and in the next, little is spoken of supplying the members of the Body with the content of the spiritual blessings with which we have been blessed. This is a shame. It defrauds the believers of a daily living in Christ as their true prize. But such a consequence is to be expected when an emphasis on future physical and material rewards slowly, but inexorably, clouds the hearts and minds of genuine believers who have been turned from God’s economy to vain talk and to profane and vain babblings (1 Tim. 1:6; 6:20).

### Conclusion

To live in the heavenlies is not to live in expectation of a heavenly mansion, to engage in fanciful imaginations, or even to worshipfully live in anticipation of heavenly rewards. There is no genuine hope in such a living because it is a living that is devoid of any real contact with the God of hope, the God who has passed through a wonderful process of incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and descension to impart Himself into His chosen elect to make them living members of His organic Body. To live in the heavenlies is to live in the realities that Paul presents in Ephesians, realities that reflect the wonderful details of the consummate sign of God’s economy, the New Jerusalem. Only this living is full of hope because only it is a living in the God of hope who has been dispensed into us and who is being expressed out from us. AFC

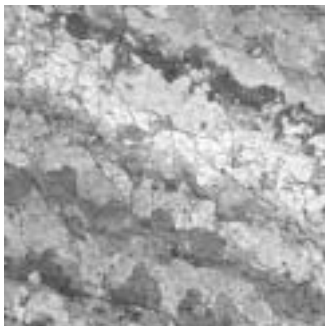
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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Monod, a Nobel prize winner in the field of molecular biology, is not a believer; indeed, he is an avowed atheist. In *Chance and Necessity*, however, he briefly speaks of the power of ideas in shaping the framework of our human interaction with the world. My reference to his considerations should not be construed as a statement of support for his entire worldview. Implicit in my critique of the notion of heaven as a place with physical mansions, however, is the assertion that it is nothing more than an ideational construct, not a reality that is present in the divine revelation of the holy Scriptures. In seeking to understand the powerful appeal of the idea of heaven within the human heart, Monod’s considerations serve a limited usefulness.

<sup>2</sup>In Colossians 1:5 Paul does indeed speak of the hope that is laid up for us in the heavens. His understanding of this hope, however, was not bounded by the physicality of heavenly mansions. In other words, He did not ascribe meaning to the Christian life based on the promise of a predominantly physical existence that unfolds after the termination of our physical existence on earth. Instead, hope and meaning are hypostatized in the person of Christ Himself, who is both in us as our hope of glory and in heaven as our laid-up hope (v. 27). Thus, Paul had a more vibrant, organic, mystical, and immediate understanding of the hope of our calling.

<sup>3</sup>Paul refers to *the heavenlies* five times (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) and to *the heavens* four times (1:10; 3:15; 4:10; 6:9). W. Hall Harris III discusses each of these references in detail in “The Heavenlies’ Reconsidered: Οὐρανός and Ἐπουράνιος in Ephesians,” and he principally concludes that there is a locative emphasis in each of the references as opposed to a realm that is “utterly transcendent” and divine (89). While there is general support for his claim, it is difficult to completely deny a sense of the transcendent and divine in Paul’s references in Ephesians. If Harris errs at all, it is in setting up mutually exclusive distinctions between that which is physical and locative and that which is divine and transcendent. The New Testament does not present such clear distinctions. In Romans 8, for example, Paul speaks of Christ being in the believers in a divine, mystical, and transcendent sense (v. 10), and also of Christ being at the right hand of God in a locative sense (v. 34).



<sup>4</sup>In a comment on Ephesians 1:18 in *The Expositor's Bible*, G. G. Findlay accepts the notion of going to heaven, but also recognizes its enervating influence on our pursuit of Christ.

What, then, is our "hope" in God? What is the ideal of our faith? For what purpose has God called us into the fellowship of His Son? What is our religion going to do for us and to make of us?

It will bring us safe home to heaven. It will deliver us from the present evil world, and preserve us unto Christ's heavenly kingdom. God forbid that we should make light of "the hope laid up for us in the heavens," or cast it aside. It is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. But is it *the* hope of our calling? Is this what St. Paul here chiefly signifies? We are very sure that it is not. But it is the one thing which stands for the hope of the gospel in many minds. "We trust that our sins are forgiven: we hope that we shall get to heaven!" The experience of how many Christian believers begins and ends there. We make of our religion a harbour of refuge, a soothing anodyne, an escape from the anguish of guilt and the fear of death; not a life-vocation, a grand pursuit. The definition we have quoted may suffice for the beginning and the end; but we need something to fill out that formula, to give body and substance, meaning and movement, to the life of faith.

Let the apostle tell us what he regarded, for himself, as the end of religion....["T]hat I may gain Christ and be found in Him!"...From eternity the Father of spirits has predestined you and me to be holy and without blemish before Him,—in a word, to be conformed to the image of His Son. Every other hope is dross compared to this. (22-23)

<sup>5</sup>This point is well-covered in Ed Marks's article in this same issue, "The New Jerusalem—A Corporate Person."

<sup>6</sup>Spots, wrinkles, and blemishes can be removed according to grace by the washing of the water in the word during this age of grace, or they can be removed according to righteousness by judgment during the coming age of the millennial kingdom. For some Christians, those who have the Holy Spirit in their regenerated spirit, their lamp, but not in their untransformed souls, their vessels, the kingdom age will be a time of weeping and gnashing of teeth. See Matthew 25:1-13, 30.

<sup>7</sup>Redemption is just one aspect of the abounding riches that enable us to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:7-8, 12).

<sup>8</sup>Both incarnation and death are implied by *blood* in verse 7. Resurrection is seen in verse 20, and the sealing and pledging of the Spirit speaks of the Triune God's descension as the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup>To contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), is not in question in this section; rather, reference is being made to the category and principle of judgment that Paul refers to in Romans 14:10-12.

<sup>10</sup>The significances of gold, precious stones, and pearl are well-covered in Ed Marks's article in this same issue, "The New Jerusalem—A Corporate Person." The primary interest in this section is to show the process of deification in Ephesians.

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