

# The GOSPEL of the PROMISED SEED: DEIFICATION according to the ORGANIC PATTERN in Romans 8 and Philippians 2

by John Pester

When the concept of deification is broached for discussion and examination by believers, there is a wide range of responses. Those in Orthodoxy readily assent to the proposition because this concept never has been marginalized in its teaching. Learned Catholics, drawing upon its Catechism, acknowledge the concept even if they do not emphasize it as a crucial tenet of the Magisterium's teaching. Protestant reactions range from diffident restraint to incredulous hostility.<sup>1</sup> Even in the diversity of these Protestant reactions, however, the progression of subsequent responses converge along a common course. First, a hint or charge of heresy almost instantly arises in the mind and often is vocalized. Then unease or revulsion often finds expression in the utterance that deification surely must be a reflection of fallen humanity's tendency toward self-exaltation.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the possibility for further consideration is cut short with the assertion that there is no biblical support for the deification of the believers.

What is illuminating about this progression in thought is the extent to which visceral reactions preclude, almost from the very beginning, any serious consideration of deification through an examination of the holy Scriptures. In fact, by initially accepting, even implicitly, the notion that deification is a heretical concept, any further need to examine the biblical record is obviated. Cloaked within such an ignoble dismissal, however, there is a subtle pattern of highmindedness. There is no consideration of others and no consideration of the things of Christ. There is instead only an ironic, self-comforting regard and reliance upon one's cursory determination that further examination of the truth claims of deification is both unwarranted and unwise.<sup>3</sup>

If, however, one reverses this progression of thought and begins with a willingness to examine the biblical record, particularly the unfolding revelation of the gospel, as it is

presented in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, a different perspective on deification emerges. Rather than being mainly sacramental, as the Orthodox suppose, this perspective is based upon a recognition of the judicial acts of our righteous and justifying God. But it also embraces the implicit promise of the operation of the divine life of the Triune God that is presented as the gospel of the promised seed in Romans.

The gospel of God is the gospel of the promised seed (1:1, 3). The center, focus, and content of this gospel is a wonderful living person, Christ, who being God became man and who being a perfect man was designated God in His uplifted and exalted humanity. The deification of the humanity of Christ in resurrection, however, is not an isolated event; it serves as a prototype for the deification of the believers. Although Romans 1:3-4 succinctly presents the prototypical deification of the seed of David, Paul's Epistle subsequently reveals that the believers, as a corporate seed (9:8; 8:29), are also being designated and deified as the glorified sons of God through the operation of the divine life (6:4-5; 8:11). The process of Christ's deification is presented in more detail in Philippians 2:5-11 as a pattern for our salvation according to the organic operation of the indwelling Triune God. This pattern is worked out in our experience through the organic operation of the law of the Spirit of life as revealed in Romans 8.

## The Organic Prototype of Deification in Romans

In a previous issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, Paul's organic emphasis in Romans on promised seed was contrasted with forensic interpretations endemic to Protestant explications of this Epistle.<sup>4</sup> Paul presents an organic gospel in Romans because he is focused on a living person, Jesus Christ our Lord, who passed through an organic process to become an organic prototype of deification so

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that God's chosen, called, and justified sons may ultimately be glorified and deified in the divine life and nature in order to fulfill His eternal purpose. This organic process began in time when "His Son," possessing only divinity in eternity past, "came out of the seed of David according to the flesh" (1:3). As the incarnated God-man, possessing both divinity and humanity,<sup>5</sup> Christ satisfied the righteous requirement of the law in His human living, ultimately becoming a propitiatory sacrifice and even the place of propitiation (3:25). He was delivered up to death for our offenses, and He was raised because of our justification. Through His resurrection, He was "designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness" (1:4).

Christ's designation as the Son of God out of the resurrection of the dead was the deification of His humanity in glory. In eternity past His divine status was never in question, but in His incarnation a new element was mingled with divinity—the perfect humanity of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Even though He was in the likeness of the flesh of sin, He was without sin (8:3; Heb. 4:15). Throughout the thirty-three and a half years of His human life, He was without sin because He lived according to the divine life, doing the divine will, being obedient in every aspect of His living as an outflow of the operation of the divine life within Him (John 6:38). Suffering the death of the cross in response to learning of and submitting to the Father's will, He entered into glory with both His divinity and His humanity (Luke 22:42; 24:26). His entering into glory was His designation as the firstborn Son of God. He was marked out as the Son of God in His humanity:

By incarnation He put on an element, the human flesh, which had nothing to do with divinity; that part of Him needed to be sanctified and uplifted by passing through death and resurrection. By resurrection His human nature was sanctified, uplifted, and transformed. Hence, by resurrection He was designated the Son of God with His humanity (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5). His resurrection was

His designation. Now, as the Son of God, He possesses humanity as well as divinity. By incarnation He brought God into man; by resurrection He brought man into God, that is, He brought His humanity into the divine sonship. In this way the only begotten Son of God was made the firstborn Son of God, possessing both divinity and humanity. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 1)

The thought contained in this footnote closely parallels Athanasius's statement that God became man in order to make man God. As the seed of David in incar-

nation, God became man in the person of Christ in order that in resurrection man might be made God in the person of Christ. In Christ, God became man. In Christ, man became God. He is the prototype of deification. No one should shrink from the truth that the humanity of Christ was deified. John Peter Lange in his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* ascribes this understanding to Martin Luther:

Luther, led by his doctrine on the Lord's Supper, concludes from the form which Christ possesses, exalted at the right hand of God (which is conceived of, not as a place of abode, but as a mode of existence), that the humanity was taken up into the divine glory, and that from the incarnation onwards the condition of humiliation appears more as a veiling, self-limitation, that of exaltation as a complete, visible revelation of the divine life. (38)

In and with His humanity, He was declared to be God, even God in the Godhead, when He was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father (6:4). Romans 1:3-4 is predicated upon the two natures of Christ, and it reveals the deification of His humanity in resurrection.<sup>7</sup> Without this understanding, the gospel of God loses its intrinsic power, and the truth of the righteousness of God, which is revealed not only in His justification but also in the fulfillment of His promise to glorify those whom He has justified, is held down (v. 18). God's righteousness binds Him to justify those who satisfy His righteous requirement through faith in Christ, and God's righteousness binds Him to deify those who satisfy His righteous requirement by walking according to spirit through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life.<sup>8</sup> The deification of the believers is not a fanciful thought but God's ordained promise.

In order to have a proper appreciation of the believers' deification, our understanding must be consistent with the revelation of the Scriptures. The starting point for consistency lies in an appreciation of the person of

Christ, especially as it was impacted by the process of His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. The goal of the gospel of the promised seed in Romans is deification, first in Christ and then in His many brothers.

According to the divine plan, which is according to the good pleasure of His will, Christ, in both His person and work, is an organic prototype of deification, a living pattern to whom we are being conformed through our union with Him. He desires to give the glory which He had with the Father to the believers that we also may be glorified and fully deified in our humanity (John 17:5, 22), but not to the point of attaining the Godhead.

The deification of the believers was initiated in and through the person and work of Christ, and it is being applied to us through the organic operation of the law of the Spirit of life. The concluding sentences of the same footnote referenced above carefully situate our deification in the context of our relationship to Christ.

God is using such a Christ, the firstborn Son, who possesses both divinity and humanity, as the producer and as the prototype, the model, to produce His many sons (8:29-30)—we who have believed in and received His Son. We too will be designated and revealed as the sons of God, as He was in the glory of His resurrection (8:19, 21), and with Him we will express God. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 1)

We have received Him (John 1:12), and He is organically applying what He has obtained and attained to our being. He is imparting Himself, a deified God-man, into us in order to make us deified God-men. Our designation and glorification as sons of God will be our deification because our designation and glorification will be in and through Christ.

The terms *designation* and *glorification* ultimately refer to deification, first in the exalted humanity of Christ and then in the designated and glorified humanity of the believers. The designation of the believers is progressive because the glorification of the believers proceeds from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Glorification is the expression of the designated status of the believers as mature sons of God. Our ultimate glorification will be the crowning confirmation that we have been fully deified in our humanity as living sons of the living God, bearing His life, nature, and expression, because we will be fully conformed to the deified image of Christ as the Firstborn.

The believers' deification is contingent upon the organic operation of the divine life, which is implied in the words *promise* and *seed*. *Promise* reveals that God is indeed operating, and *seed* reveals that this operation is organic in nature, involving the divine life.

The Firstborn is the promised seed who was designated the Son of God in resurrection. He was begotten of God in His humanity on the day of His resurrection, a birth that fully deified every aspect of His humanity, as the Father declared in raising up Jesus: "You are My Son; this day have I begotten You" (Acts 13:33). As the promised seed, as an organic prototype, the Firstborn has many brothers. Marvelously, therefore, the gospel of the promised seed in Romans is the gospel of a deified seed who is being applied as an organic prototype to all those who also have been accounted as part of the promised seed (Rom. 9:8).

### The Organic Process of Deification in Romans

Deification is the goal of the gospel of the promised seed in Romans. It is the hope that is not seen, the hope that we eagerly await (8:24-25). Deification in Romans is an organic process that involves the believers' growth and maturity in the divine life of the Triune God. It is more than just a declarative or sacramental phenomenon,<sup>9</sup> an issue of the will of the flesh or the will of man (John 1:13). Instead, it is a divine and organic operation (Eph. 1:19; 3:7, 20; 4:16; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:29; 2:12). At the very root of this operation in life is love, the love of God from which we cannot be separated and out from which God purposed a plan according to His good pleasure, a plan to deify His chosen and elect. The central item in the execution of His plan within the believers was His promise of seed.

The process of the believers' deification is contingent upon the organic operation of the divine life, which is implied in the words *promise* and *seed*. The word *promise* reveals that God is indeed operating, and the word *seed* reveals that this operation is organic in nature, involving the divine life.<sup>10</sup> *Promise* or *promised* occurs eight times in Romans (1:2; 4:13-14, 16, 20-21; 9:8-9). In every instance, Paul uses the word *seed* within the immediate context of *promise* and *promised*, even occurring three times within the same verse (4:13, 16; 9:8). Some may say that too much is being made of this association,

arguing that the close proximity of these two words should be expected, given the fact that the promise to Abraham, the subject of Paul's illustration in chapter four, involved the promise of a seed who would inherit the world (v. 13). Such an argument, however, only reinforces the point of this article by reiterating the fact that God's promise involves seed and by underscoring the fact that divine seed, not judicial justification by faith, is the content of the gospel, "which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures" (1:2). The promised gospel and the promise of the gospel are the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:8, 14), which is the promise of seed.

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*Promise* implies action and movement toward the accomplishment of a stated purpose that has been affirmed with an oath (Heb. 6:17). The fact that God's affirmed purpose involves seed should give us pause to consider just how much our understanding of God's operation has been limited and our view of the goal of this operation obscured by a narrow forensic hermeneutic. The goal of God's promise is deification.

God's promise is a reflection of His will, and thus every believer must begin to realize that deification originates in the mind, the will, and the actions of the Triune God. The declaration that we will be like God,<sup>11</sup> that we will be God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, is not a self-exalting thought of fallen humanity. This thought originates in the heart of God Himself, and it is worked out through the self-condescending operation of God Himself. In this graceful and loving operation, God refuses to regard His own virtues, to grasp and retain what He is in His own being. Rather, He is willing to impart all that He is to His chosen and redeemed believers. Frederic Louis Godet captures this thought well in his discussion of the believer's conformation to the image of His Son. Note how he ties Romans 8:29 to the very aim of God in the creation of humanity, a significant component in His divine operation:

Paul does not say: "conformed or like *to His Son*," but: "*to the image of His Son*." By using this form of expression, he undoubtedly means that Christ has realized in Himself a higher *type of existence* (εἰκῶν, *image*), which we are to realize after Him. This is the existence of the God-man, as we behold it in Christ; such is the glorious vesture which God takes from the person of His Son, that therewith He may clothe believers. What, in point of fact, was the aim of God in the creation of man? He wished to have for Himself a family of sons; and therefore He determined in the first place to make His own Son our brother. Then in His person He raises our humanity to the divine state; and finally, He makes all believing men sharers in this glorious form of existence. Such are the contents of the decree. (326)

It is a marvelous point to ponder that in eternity past, God chose to regard the virtues of deified humanity, humanity deified through conformity to the image of His Son. When God chose us in eternity past, His choosing was not based on our position as fallen humanity; that is, He did not see us as sinners, and then being merciful, choose us. His choosing also was not based on our position as created humanity; that is, He did not see us as perfect humanity untainted by the fall, and then being loving,

choose us. No! His choosing was based on our position as deified humanity; that is, He saw us as deified sons in His deified Son and still according to His mercy and love, chose us. All of His will and intention, affirmed through His promise of seed, will redound to the praise of the glory of His grace with which He graced us in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6). And because of His promise of seed, there will be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever (3:21). This is the wondrous consummation of the operation of the God who operates in us the willing and working for His good pleasure.<sup>12</sup>

The operation of God depends upon seed and produces seed. From the prototype in Romans 1:3 to the producing of a corporate seed in verse 8 of chapter nine, the process of deification is unveiled as an organic operation. The union in life and nature between God and His chosen and redeemed is so intimately related that the word *seed* in 4:13 and 16 refers to both Christ and the believers. The believers come out of Christ, who is the seed. He is the One who fell into the ground as a seed, a single grain, to bring forth many grains, the corporate seed (John 12:24; Isa. 53:10). The power of the divine life is now operating in the believers (I speak in faith here) to bring them on to maturity, to fully express God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.

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## The Organic Pattern of Deification in Philippians 2

The expression of God in the believers who are becoming God in life and nature, however, is not without a pattern. It is one thing to be “spiritual,” to have a “proper form of the knowledge and truth in the law” (Rom. 2:20); it is another thing to truly be God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. It is possible for our “spirituality” to be nothing more than self-righteousness and religiosity, having an outward form of godliness but in reality denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5). Consequently, any concept or subjective experience must be in accord with the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures. If we are truly being deified, our experiences will match the pattern of His experiences; they will even be His experiences lived out in our daily living. In effect, He will be an organic pattern in our living as our living. This organic pattern is presented quite clearly in Philippians 2.

### The Pattern of Christ's Thinking

The fact that He is an organic pattern is indicated by Paul's exhortation to let the mind of Christ be in us (v. 5). The mind of Christ is the thinking of Christ, the way of His thinking. Paul is not referring to just a momentary thought, a sudden inspiration, within the mind of Christ; he is referring to the organic constitution of the mind of God. God thinks, and how He thinks and the consequent actions that flow from His thinking are detailed in verses 6 through 11. Then Paul exhorts us to let this mind be our way of thinking by cooperating with the inward operation of the Triune God. The mind of Christ

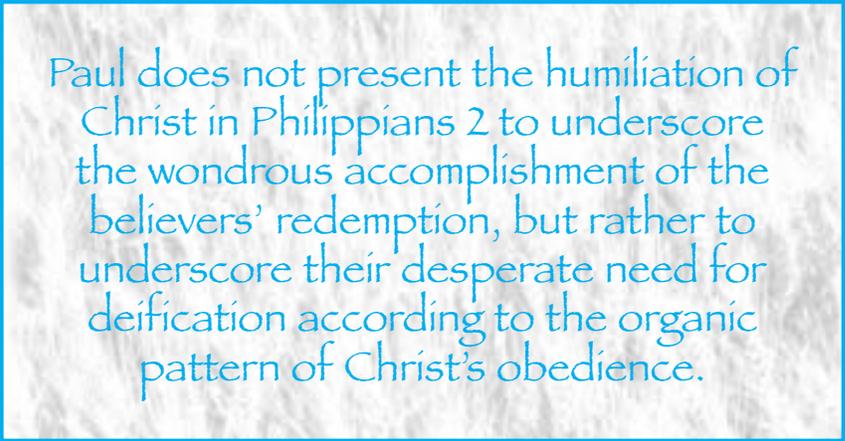
refers to the considering in v. 3 and the regarding in v. 4. This kind of thinking, this kind of mind, was also in Christ when He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and humbled Himself, being found in fashion as a man (vv. 7-8). To have such a mind requires us to be one with Christ in His inward parts (1:8). To experience Christ, we need to be one with Him to this extent, that is, in His tender inward feeling and in His thinking. (Recovery Version, Phil. 2:5, note 1)

Any genuine experience of deification will bear the imprint, the pattern, of the thinking of Christ. In this pattern there is a regard for the virtues of others, a regard that serves as the source of submission and thus of obedience. This organic pattern encompasses the humiliation of the only begotten Son (vv. 6-7), the obedience of the incarnated God-man, Jesus (v. 8), and the exaltation of the deified God-man (vv. 9-10). When His thinking becomes our thinking, we will be God in life, nature, and expression

because our living will come out of a mind that is constituted with His divine life and nature. Philippians 2 reveals the pattern of our deification and the necessity of our cooperation with God's organic operation of deification.

### The Pattern of Christ's Obedience

Contrary to what many teach in regard to this chapter, Paul does not present the humiliation of Christ in Philippians 2 to underscore the wondrous accomplishment of the believers' redemption, but rather to underscore their desperate need for deification according to the organic pattern of Christ's obedience. Without



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experiencing this pattern, there is only selfish ambition, highminded regard for one's own virtues, and division (vv. 2-4). There is little, if any, consolation of love, fellowship of spirit, and tenderheartedness and compassion (v. 1). It is unfortunate that many Christians see this passage only through the narrow lens of redemption, focusing on Christ's obedience “unto death, and that the death of a cross” (v. 8), rather than realizing that verses 6 through 11 are, quite simply, a description of how God became a man in order to make this man, Jesus, God. By focusing on redemption, the connection between the organic obedience of Christ and deification is lost. This mistaken emphasis can be seen in the interpretation of these verses by Albert Barnes and John Peter Lange, respectively.

He did not consider that that honour, indicating equality with God, was to be retained at all events, and so as to do violence, as it were, to other interests, and to rob the universe of *the glory of redemption*; and that he was willing, therefore, to forget that, or lay it by for a time, *in order that he might redeem the world*. (171, emphasis added)

He did not look simply to His own things—the glories of the Godhead; but He looked to the things of others, and therefore descended to humanity and death. His heart was not so set upon this glory, that he would not appear at any time without it. There was something which he

coveted more—something which He felt to be truly a ὀραγματός, and that was *the redemption of a fallen world* by His self-abasement and death. (35, emphasis added)

Rather than reflecting upon the accomplishment of redemption in the past, Paul presents Christ as an organic pattern of obedience in these verses to focus the believers in Philippi on the Triune God's ongoing operation of deification. The believers in Philippi, who had previously experienced the enjoyment of deification that comes from being fellow partakers of grace and from being filled with the fruit of righteousness (1:7, 11), were being reminded of the need for their reasonings and high thoughts to be overthrown and brought unto the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Christ's obedience unfolded in time in order to establish an organic pattern of deification, not to die on the cross, even though His death on the cross was a consequence of His obedience.<sup>13</sup> Charles John Ellicott instructively points out that even the phrase *the death of a cross* does not refer to redemption; instead, it illustrates the depth of Christ's obedience. Since the central theme of this passage is a living that is according to the pattern of Christ, Ellicott argues that this phrase should not be understood as a reference to redemption since the believers have no part in Christ's atoning death. With regard to redemp-

throughout the days of His flesh, rather than just a momentary obedience at the point of His death on the cross, is also contained in the New Geneva Study Bible's footnote to Philippians 2:8: "Paul's words embrace Christ's whole lifetime of obedience, while emphasizing that the supreme expression of obedience was His death" (1877).

With an understanding that focuses on the pattern of Christ's obedience, it is much easier to see Athanasius's aphorism in these verses. First, God became man, that is, Christ, who was existing in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave,<sup>14</sup> becoming in the likeness of men (vv. 6-7). Then through obedience, even obedience unto death, man became God, being highly exalted in resurrection (vv. 8-9). Now in the name of a man, Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall declare that this man is God (vv. 10-11). In the person of Christ, God became man in order to make man God. With respect to His divinity and humanity, Jesus Christ is God in life and nature and even in the Godhead. "The Lord humbled Himself to the uttermost, but God exalted Him to the highest peak" (Recovery Version, v. 9, note 1). The highest peak is the deification of humanity in the person of Christ.

Although many commentators fail to explicitly detect the pattern of deification that is presented in Philippians 2, they seem to implicitly understand that the elements in verses 6 through 11 speak to the reality of God becoming man and man becoming God in the person of Christ. In regard to His divinity, the New Geneva Study Bible states that the "word 'form' refers to the underlying reality and not to appearance only. Jesus' being in 'the form of God' means that He is divine" (1877). In regard to His humanity in exaltation, Barnes notes that "this exaltation is spoken of the Redeemer *as he was*, sustaining a divine and a human nature" (174). A. T. Robertson in *Word Pictures in the New Testament* asks, "What glory did Christ have after the Ascension that he did not have before in heaven?" and then answers, "Clearly his humanity. He returned to heaven the Son of Man as well as the Son of God" (445). The New Geneva Study Bible conflates these designations and simply says, "The ascription of praise" in verse 11 "embraces both the humanity ('Jesus') and the deity ('Lord') of Christ; He is worshiped as the God-Man" (1877).

Although these verses confirm the reality of an organic pattern of deification in the person of the God-man, Jesus Christ, this pattern is not presented for the sake of doctrine. It is presented to show the believers that their

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tion, God's work is done; with regard to crucifying the flesh with its passions and lusts, especially the lust for position and vainglory (Gal. 5:24; Phil. 2:3), there is a need for the experience of the cross. This experience comes when we are led by the Spirit to put to death the practices of the body (Rom. 8:13-14). And this experience requires the obedience of Christ in response to the leading of the Spirit. In this regard, Christ is an organic pattern to us. Ellicott states, "'He became obedient,' that is, to God's will, 'even up to death.' His death is not here regarded as an atonement, for in that light it could be no pattern to us; but as the completion of the obedience of His life" (74). The thought of Christ's complete obedience to God

salvation depends upon their continuing cooperation, their obedience, with the willing and the working of this organic pattern within their inward parts. Verses 6 through 11 are inserted between verses that deal with obstacles to a believer's full salvation, principally ambition and vainglory (vv. 2-4),<sup>15</sup> and verses that relate to the operation of this organic pattern for the working out of our full salvation (v. 12). This is not an insignificant operation; it is an operation that is according to the good pleasure of the Triune God for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose.

### *The Pattern according to God's Good Pleasure*

The phrase *His good pleasure* in verse 3 is a specific reference to the eternal purpose of God. To know this purpose is to know the ultimate significance of the passage in verses 6 through 11. His good pleasure clearly alludes to Paul's utterance in Ephesians 1:5 and 9. In Ephesians 1, Paul unveils the blessings of the Triune God by first speaking of the believers being chosen before the foundation of the world (vv. 4-5). Before sin entered into the world, God chose some in Christ to be holy and without blemish. This choosing, involving the believers' predestination unto sonship through Jesus Christ, was wholly according to *the good pleasure of His will* (v. 5). Predestination is further revealed to be "according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (v.11). God's pleasure cannot be separated from His purpose and will, and His purpose involves sonship.

Verse 9 further details the relationship between God's good pleasure and His eternal purpose. The attainment of God's predestinated sonship depends upon redemption through His blood and the abounding riches of His grace (vv. 7-8). The former requirement was satisfied by Christ on the cross; the latter is experienced to the extent that the mystery of His will is made known *according to His good pleasure*, which He purposed in Himself (v. 9). God's good pleasure is His purpose. Humanly speaking, purposeful motivations come out of the pleasure of the heart. What the heart longs for, the heart seeks. First there is a willful longing; then there is a willful working toward a goal. Out of the Triune God's desire for many sons, He worked to accomplish redemption in the Son, and He now is working to make known the riches of His grace by arranging all things according to the counsel of His will.

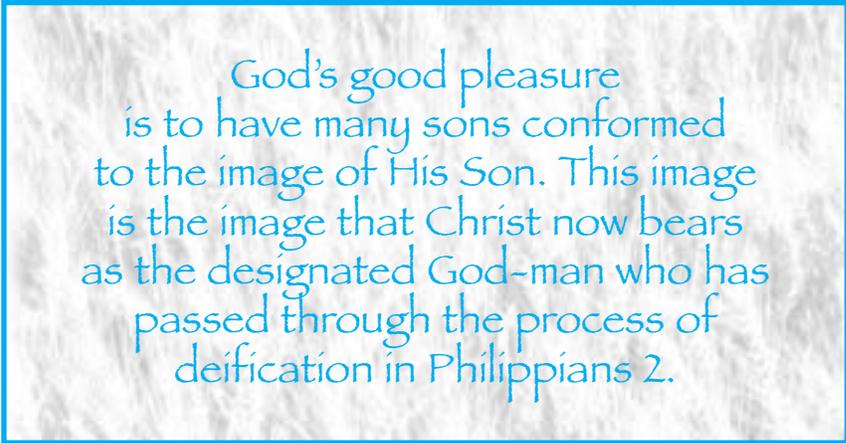
*The good pleasure of His will* and *His good pleasure* in Ephesians are equal to *His good pleasure* in Philippians.

All of these phrases are linked to His purpose in predestination, as stated in Ephesians 1:5 and 11 and in Romans 8:28-29, which says,

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. (emphasis added)

God's goal, God's purpose, is to have many sons conformed to the image of His Son. These verses in Romans not only refer to God's eternal purpose and His predestination but also to *all things* that are according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).

The relationship between the divine realities and blessings that are signified by the terms *good pleasure*, *will*, *purpose*, and *predestination* in these three Epistles of Paul is a strong indication that his presentation in Philippians 2 is for the sake of the believers' deification through their organic conformation to the image of the Son. God's good pleasure is to have many sons conformed to the image of His Son. This image is the image that Christ now bears as the designated God-man who has passed through the process of deification in Philippians 2. Conformation is the organic reproduction



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of the Firstborn, the organic prototype of deification, within the many sons of God for their deification.

Christ was the only begotten Son of God from eternity (John 1:18). When He was sent by God into the world, He was still the only begotten Son of God (1 John 4:9; John 1:14; 3:16). By His passing through death and entering into resurrection, His humanity was uplifted into His divinity. Thus, in His divinity with His humanity that passed through death and resurrection, He was born in resurrection as God's firstborn Son (Acts 13:33). At the same time, all His believers were raised together with Him in His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3) and were begotten

together with Him as the many sons of God. Thus they became His many brothers to constitute His Body and be God's corporate expression in Him.

As the only begotten Son of God, Christ had divinity but not humanity; He was self-existing and ever-existing, as God is. His being the firstborn Son of God, having both divinity and humanity, began with His resurrection. With His firstborn Son as the base, pattern, element, and means, God is producing many sons, and the many sons who are produced are the many believers who believe into God's firstborn Son and are joined to Him as one. They are exactly like Him in life and nature, and, like Him, they have both humanity and divinity. They are His increase and expression in order that they may express the eternal Triune God for eternity. (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:29, note 4)

The reproduction of the Firstborn within the many sons of God is according to the organic pattern of Christ's mind and Christ's obedience. A believer who is in the process of being deified has a different view, knowing some things, not knowing other things, but in both circumstances is content and submissive to the things that are divinely ordained. Being God in life and nature, he knows that all things work together for good, especially the sufferings of the present age, because he knows the glory of the divine life in resurrection (8:18, 21) by walking in newness of life (6:4). "To walk in newness of life means to live today in the realm of resurrection and to reign in life. This kind of living deals with all that is of Adam in us until we are fully transformed and conformed to the image of Christ (8:29)" (Recovery Version, v. 4, note 4). And being God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, he does not presume to be God's counselor (11:34); neither does he always know how to pray as is fitting, having no part in the omniscience that is the sole prerogative of the Godhead, and so there is a contentment and willingness to simply groan, knowing that the Spirit will join in and intercede (8:26). When we cooperate with the operation of the willing and working Triune God, details such as these are worked out in our living unto our full salvation.

The believers work out their own salvation by participating in the process of deification, being joined to Christ, who is an organic pattern of obedience. The pattern of His obedience, which is the organic obedience that comes out from Him, is our salvation.

The believers work out their own salvation by participating in the process of deification, being joined to Christ, who is an organic pattern of obedience. The pattern of His obedience, which is the organic obedience that comes out from Him, is our salvation. In fear and trembling, we should cooperate with the Triune God's inward operation so that our salvation can be brought to its ultimate conclusion (Phil. 2:12-13), our conformation to the image of the His Son in glory.

We have received God's salvation, which has as its climax our being exalted by God in glory as the Lord Jesus was (v. 9). We need to carry out this salvation, to bring it to its ultimate conclusion, by our constant and absolute obedience with fear and trembling. We have received this salvation by faith; now we must carry it out by obedience, which includes our being genuinely one in our soul (v. 2). To receive this salvation by faith is once for all; to carry it out is lifelong. (Recovery Version, v. 12, note 3)

The salvation that Paul speaks of is not a salvation from condemnation and judgment but a daily salvation that

results from taking the very Christ whom we live, experience, and enjoy as our inward as well as outward pattern. The main elements of this salvation are Christ as the crucified life (vv. 5-8) and Christ in His exaltation (vv. 9-11). (v. 12, note 4)

Although Paul exhorts the believers to work out their own salvation and even presents the elements of this salvation in verses 5 through 11, many Christians still focus only upon self-improvement. This is a work that comes out of the flesh, not out of the obedience of faith. Reverting to the practice of the law only produces fleshly transgressions, failure, and disappointment.<sup>16</sup> Many Christians are saved from eternal perdition, but having been reconciled, they have little or no experience of being saved in His life (Rom. 5:10). The details of this saving life are not presented in Philippians 2 because Paul is burdened only to remind the Philippians of what they already know, that is, that they need to obey, once again, the inward operation of the Triune God. The details of this operation, however, are presented in Romans 8 because Paul is burdened to unfold the full contents of the gospel of the promised seed in this Epistle.

#### The Application of the Organic Pattern of Deification in Romans 8

The organic pattern of deification in Philippians 2, from God becoming a man in verses 7 and 8 to man becoming God in verses 9 through 11, is mirrored and

applied in Romans 8, from God becoming a man for the sake of the believers in verses 3 and 4 to the believers becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead through their conformation to the image of His Son in verses 29 and 30. The application of this organic pattern is through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life which progressively dispenses and imparts the Triune God into every part of redeemed humanity's tripartite being.

The God who operates in us is the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—the very God who is Christ in us (2 Cor. 13:3a, 5) and the Spirit in us (Rom. 8:11). The three—the Spirit, God, and Christ—are one. (Recovery Version, Phil. 2:13, note 2)

Witness Lee insightfully links the operation of the Triune God in Philippians 2:13 to the operation of the Triune God in Romans 8:

The willing is within; the working is without. The willing takes place in our will, indicating that God's operation begins from our spirit (cf. 4:23) and spreads into our mind, emotion, and will. This corresponds with Rom. 8, where we see that God works from our spirit (Rom. 8:4), through our mind (Rom. 8:6), and eventually into our physical body (Rom. 8:11). (Recovery Version, Phil. 2:13, note 4)

In this operation not only is there a dispensing of the deifying life of the promised seed into our tripartite being, but there is also an organic obedience that spontaneously fulfills the righteous requirement of the law as we walk according to our mingled human spirit, minding the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5). The sending of His Son is not for the sake of spirituality but rather that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, because righteousness is the basis of God's deifying operation. The righteous shall have life and live by faith (1:17). In the obedience that is according to the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, the organic pattern of the deified and designated God-man is wrought into those who are being conformed to the image of the Son, the promised seed.

Conformation...includes the changing of our inward essence and nature, and it also includes the changing of our outward form, that we may match the glorified image of Christ, the God-man. He is the prototype and we are the mass production. Both the inward and the outward changes in us, the product, are the result of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life (v. 2) in our being. (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:29, note 3)

Just as the pattern of deification in Philippians 2 involves obedience unto crucifixion and exaltation, the application of the pattern in Romans 8 also involves obedience unto crucifixion and exaltation. The obedience that is unto the death of the cross and which issues in deification does not come from self-effort but from the Spirit. It is only by the Spirit, which operates as a law of life, that the practices of the body can be put to death (v. 13). In the context of Romans 7 and 8 the practices of the body, the flesh, are not just the gross and sinful things but even more our efforts to please God through the will of the flesh (v. 8). It is our efforts to live according to the good part of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that most hinder us from being deified. Trying to live according to a knowledge of good and evil, ironically, focuses our being, especially our mind, on the flesh, on knowing good and evil (vv. 5-7). Unwittingly but subtly, the believers succumb to the efforts of God's adversary as he seeks to thwart God's good pleasure by putting God's chosen people under the bondage of sin and the enslavement of corruption (v. 21).

The putting to death of the practices of the body, the application of the organic pattern, is an inward operation in life. This operation, however, is aided by the environment in which we, as human beings living in corruption, unavoidably find ourselves. It is an environment whose principal characterization is subjection to vanity and suffering (vv. 18, 20). When the designation of the promised seed is considered, however, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed upon us" (v. 18). The coming revelation is the designation, the consummation of our deification. "Although we are the sons of God, we are veiled, not yet revealed. At the Lord's second coming, when we will be glorified and our bodies will be fully redeemed, the veil will be lifted" (Recovery Version, v. 19, note 2).

In the midst of unavoidable sufferings, as we seek for answers, there often is no easy answer. We look to prayer, but often there is no prayer, no utterance, no

The practices of the body, the flesh, are not just the gross and sinful things but even more our efforts to please God through the will of the flesh. It is our efforts to live according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that most hinder us from being deified.

Our conformation to the image of His Son is our deification. This is accomplished through the law of the Spirit of life, which operates in every part of our tripartite being to reproduce within us the organic pattern of deification in Philippians 2.

sense of direction. In some respects this is fitting. To always know how to pray would mean that we know what God knows; that is, we would know what we need for the accomplishment of our designation, and that is truly beyond our measure. Only God knows this, but He does not leave us to our own devices (Prov. 19:21). Having Him as the firstfruits of the Spirit, we groan in ourselves, eagerly awaiting sonship (Rom. 8:23), and “in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (v. 26).

The weakness here is our ignorance of how we should pray. We do not know the kind of prayer God desires, and we are not clear how to pray, according to the burden we feel, for our being conformed to the image of God’s Son; hence, we groan (v. 23). In our groaning the Spirit groans also, interceding for us. His interceding is mainly that we may experience the transformation in life for growth into the maturity of sonship that we may be fully conformed to the image of God’s Son. (Recovery Version, v. 26, note 2)

In this mingled groaning of the Spirit in our spirit, there is a deeper understanding and appreciation of our sufferings, not to the point that we would seek to suffer for the sake of suffering, but certainly to the point that we would not reject our situations of suffering nor rebel against our predestinating, calling, justifying, and glorifying God (v. 30). In this mingled groaning, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (v. 28). The *good* in verse 28

is not related to physical persons, matters, or things. It refers to our gaining more of Christ, to our having Him wrought into our being, that we may be transformed metabolically and may eventually be conformed to His image, the image of the Son of God. (Recovery Version, v. 28, note 3)

Our conformation to the image of His Son is our deification. This is accomplished through the application of the law of the Spirit of life, which operates in every part of our tripartite being to reproduce within us the organic pattern of deification in Philippians 2, according to the promise of God. Nothing can separate us from this promise in Paul’s organic gospel. The gospel is a gospel of promised seed which operates in the realm of the divine life and nature of God to deify His chosen human vessels, making them God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. This may sound like

heresy to some, but it is the gospel that Paul presented; and it is the organic content of the form of teaching into which he delivered the believers. To those who would shrink back, challenge, or haughtily feign a false humility in their rejection of this teaching, I would only echo the words of a slave, who did not presume to question the authority of the potter over the clay, when he asked, “O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?” (9:20). And who are you to say to God that He cannot make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He has before prepared unto glory? (v. 23). Praise Him, we will not be like Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 29), and we will not even be just human, O man, because He has left us a seed, a seed that has been organically enlarged, with the power to make us God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. **LFC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>There is not enough space in this article to seriously examine the variations that exist in the understandings of the concept of deification among the three major branches of Christianity—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. The Protestant reaction is centrally addressed herein. My lack of critical examination of the Orthodox and Catholic views, however, should not be understood as a wholesale endorsement of their interpretative emphases. In brief, I believe that both Orthodoxy and Catholicism unduly emphasize a sacramental appropriation of the spiritual realities inherent in the experience of deification, which ultimately strips this truth of its promise and power.

<sup>2</sup>We are not oblivious to the source of humanity’s fallen tendency toward self-exaltation; it arises out of our sinful nature, our constitution with sin, which was brought into being through disobedience in response to words of temptation related to being like God (Rom. 5:19; Gen. 3:5). Our constitution of sin, in and of itself, is a manifestation of the self-exalting source of our corrupted humanity, a being whose paramount motivation was to be like the Most High (Isa. 14:13-14). Self-exaltation motivates all fallen human activity because it motivates Satan’s

activity. It was he, after all, who first said in his heart,

I will ascend to heaven; / Above the stars of God / I will exalt my throne. / And I will sit upon the mount of assembly / In the uttermost parts of the north. / I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; / I will make myself like the Most High. (Isa. 14:13-14)

And it was he who tempted in the garden with the subtle words, “You shall not surely die! For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4-5).

Satan’s desire to be “like the Most High” and his tempting words concerning being “like God” seem to be compelling evidence that deification should be shunned and rejected altogether. While these two passages give great comfort to those who would dismiss deification, such comfort is uninformed and unwarranted. Rather than undermining the teaching of deification, these verses, properly considered, confirm a proper, biblical understanding of deification.

The boldness for such a claim does not come from a mindless trumpeting of a teaching foreign to the Word of God but rather from a growing trust that the words in the Bible are faithful and true (Rev. 21:5). They are faithful and true in their revelation of God, of humanity, and, yes, even of God’s adversary, Satan, concerning whom the Lord accurately exposed as one who “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). So complete is his corruption that out of his own possessions he can only speak lies. “He is a liar and the father of it” (v. 44).

The words that are faithfully recorded in Isaiah 14:13-14 reveal Satan’s inward corruption and rebellious overreaching, his desire to be like God in the Godhead, as indicated by the phrases *exalt my throne* and *the Most High*. Ezekiel 28, in its typological depiction of Satan as the king of Tyre, reveals that before his rebellion, Satan already had the highest position in God’s created order. He was the anointed cherub who covered the Ark (v. 14). There was no position in heaven higher than his, other than that possessed by God Himself, a position reflecting His preeminence in His Godhead. Yet Satan still desired to exalt his throne, an exaltation that could only be regarded as an impingement upon the power and position of the Most High in His Godhead. Satan’s desire to be like the Most High was a desire to become like God in His Godhead, and this understanding of deification, like its source, is worthy only of being cast out and cast to the ground (vv. 16-17).

Isaiah 14 reveals that Satan attempted to be like God in His Godhead through rebellion; Philippians 2 reveals that Jesus in His humanity became God, not only in life and nature but also in the Godhead (vv. 9-11), by living a human life of obedience and submission according to the divine life and nature that He

Those who would use Satan’s words to Eve as a proof text against the teaching of deification should never forget that he spoke a lie in the garden, not the truth. Such a defense is fraught with the risk of upholding his lie as the truth.

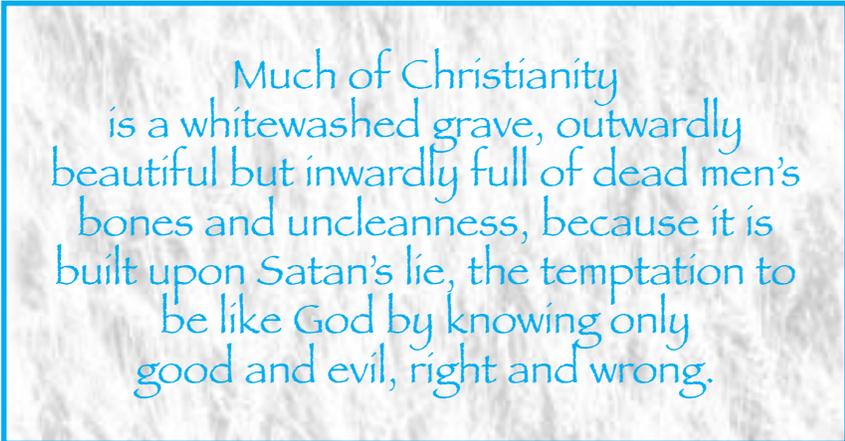
had when He was in the form of God in eternity (vv. 8, 6). Romans 8 then reveals that the believers will become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead by the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, which imparts and applies the organic pattern of obedience in Christ Jesus, conforming them to the image of the Son.

The words that are faithfully recorded in Genesis 3:5 reveal the lie that came out of Satan’s inward corruption. Those who would use Satan’s words to Eve as a proof text against the teaching of deification should never forget that he spoke a lie in the garden, not the truth. Such a defense is fraught with the risk of upholding his lie as the truth. Rather than regarding his lie as a warning against the dangers of deification, we should examine his words to determine the intent and effect of his lie. In such an inquiry there are but two possibilities: Either his words were a grandiose overstatement of God’s divine purpose for humanity or they were a gross understatement. The thrust of his argument reveals that his words were of the latter rather than former variety. In speaking against God, Satan’s intention is never to exalt Him but rather to cause Him to be depreciated in the eyes of His creatures. In Satan’s words in the garden, his hidden intention was to slander God, and the effect of his accusation was to diminish God’s standing in the eyes of His creatures by suggesting a craven determination on God’s part to grasp for Himself and withhold from them what He is in His inward being. But this is not the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-6). When Satan said, “For God knows,” the real target of his accusation was God, not Eve, because he needed to undermine the preeminent position that God had in her heart. And when he said, “Your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil,” he was suggesting that God was withholding something precious and valuable, retaining it for Himself.

The effect of Satan’s lie was to shift Eve’s affection and worship from the Creator to another creature—himself—because it is a quick descent into idolatry when one does not glorify God (Rom. 1:21, 23, 25). Satan undermined the worship of God by suggesting that there was something less than unconditional love in His heart because He was withholding something higher from them—the capacity to be like Him in knowing good and evil.

On the surface, Satan's words presented a promise of something better by seemingly overstating the place of humanity in the divine plan, but beneath the surface, his words were suffused with deception because, in fact, he was grossly understating humanity's central role in God's plan. From Satan's perspective and for the purpose of temptation, his words were couched in the form of a dramatic overstatement; but from God's perspective, Satan's lying words significantly understated His divine plan.

When God placed humanity in front of the tree of life, He was signifying His desire and plan for humanity to partake of Him as life, to be joined to Him in a union of life, and to fully match Him in His image and according to His likeness. This is far



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greater, far higher, than just knowing good and evil. God is not confined to such a narrow sphere of being or operation. He certainly knows good and evil, but He knows much more and is much more. He also is righteous and holy; He is light and love. And He is willing to freely give humanity all that He is and has, except His Godhead. But this is not something that those who genuinely are being deified with the life and nature of the Triune God would even seek. Rather, than seeking exaltation, they are willing to go along with the lowly, to be subject one to another, and to serve as slaves in the pattern of the One to whom they are being conformed (Rom. 12:16; Eph. 5:21; Rev. 22:3; Rom. 8:29).

By causing Eve to momentarily shift her focus and affection from God, the understatement inherent in Satan's lie was masked by what appeared to be an alluring promise of being like God in knowing good and evil. We need to understand that the essence of Satan's lie was to grossly understate God's intentions.

To consider deification is not to align ourselves with a satanic thought; rather, it is the beginning of a truthful discussion of what it really means to glorify Him. When we begin to thank Him for His expansive, eternal desire to make us the same as He is in life and in nature, our eyes and affection will return to Him, and we will begin to partake of the divine nature, which is at the core of His precious and exceedingly great promises to us (2 Pet. 1:4).

Lastly, as Christians, we should be willing to take a long, hard look at how much of our teachings are in the realm of just knowing good and evil, that is, how much they are aligned with the satanic characterization of God's plan rather than God's.

This is not easy to say, but most of Christianity is fully absorbed in the lie of the enemy in its pursuit of good through the promotion of ethics, morality, and outward obedience to commandments and in its distancing of itself from self-perceived taints of evil. Much of Christianity is a whitewashed grave, outwardly beautiful but inwardly full of dead men's bones and uncleanness, because it is built upon Satan's lie, the temptation to be like God by knowing only good and evil, right and wrong. Fighting against a scriptural understanding of deification, especially with the recourse and support of Satan's lie, is the height of darkness, the height of the blind, who have been blinded by the god of this age, leading the blind.

<sup>3</sup>This comfort is actually the sense of pride that emerges when one self-confidently assumes that he has defended and upheld the glory of God in his swift rejection of "heresy." While God is more than capable of defending and upholding His glory and more than capable of operating in us the willing and working of His good pleasure, we must be willing to let another mind, another thought, become our thought, our mind. May we all be like the noble Bereans and

look into the Word to see if the things concerning our deification are so (Acts 17:11).

<sup>4</sup>See "The Gospel of the Promised Seed in Romans: Transformation for Designation unto Inheritance." *Affirmation & Critique* VI.2 (October 2001): 35-50.

<sup>5</sup>As a God-man, Jesus Christ possesses both divinity and humanity, without separation, without confusion, and without the creation of a third substance. The union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ is an essential component of the divine plan. In relation to redemption, for example, His divinity imbued His death on the cross with its eternal efficacy, and His perfect humanity, especially in the shedding of His blood, made the demonstration of God's righteousness in justification possible. The details of this union have been the subject of endless speculation, but they remain mysteriously elusive. Concerning this matter, we see through a glass darkly. Affirmation rather than explanation is the best recourse, and even in affirmation there is an element of mystery.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which affirmed this great truth, declared that there is no separation but at the same time no confusion of natures. No separation suggests complete union, but no confusion implies some level of distinction. Clearly, mysterious! Even the tendency of our fallen mentality to be occupied with philosophical speculation is circumscribed by the affirmation that a third substance, a *tertium quid*, was not

created in the union of the two natures. With such a limitation, there is clarity only when the mysterious is embraced in the realm of faith.

The affirmations of Chalcedon inform our understanding of the term *mingling* in regard to both the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ and of its application to the believers' union with Christ, even though this term of Eutyches was condemned at Chalcedon with his emphasis on a mingling that produced one substance to the extent of confusing the two natures. We utilize this term because the Scriptures employ it in relation to the meal offering in Leviticus 2:4, which long has been recognized as a type of Christ. In the mingling of the oil, representing divinity, and the fine flour, representing the humanity of Christ as the grain of wheat (John 12:24), each ingredient in the meal offering retains its essential properties. A renewed mind would never take the position that the Scriptures support a Eutychian emphasis simply because the same term is present. Likewise, we reject any characterization of our understanding of the union of the two natures of Christ as being in accord with the Eutychian understanding simply because the same term is utilized. Simple minds that come to such simple characterizations need to read deeper.

<sup>6</sup>In Section 8, paragraph 17, of the "Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord," an interesting distinction is alluded to, but not developed, in regard to the concept of mingling. It states,

Against this condemned heresy the Christian Church always and at all times has simply believed and held that the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ are so united that they have a true communion with one another, whereby the natures [do not meet and] are not mingled in one essence, but, as Dr. Luther writes, in one person. (*Triglot Concordia* 427)

For the greater part of this statement, the Lutheran (and Chalcedonian) condemnation of mingling, as espoused by Eutyches, is repeated; that is, it rejects a mingling of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ that produced one essence in which the essential properties of both the divine and human natures were not retained. On this we are in full agreement. In the latter part of the statement, however, there is an interesting development. The wording of the "Solid Declaration" seems to point to an understanding of mingling that closely accords with the picture in Leviticus 2:4, that is, that the two substances were mingled not into a new essence but in one loaf, that is, in one person, the person of Christ. To touch the person of Christ is to touch One who, at the same time, is the complete God by virtue of His divinity and a perfect man by virtue of His humanity. Further study of this statement in the Solid Declaration might prove to be constructive, especially a study of the things that "Dr. Luther writes."

<sup>7</sup>Without seeing the central role of the two natures in the person of Christ, interpretations of Romans 1:3-4 lack significance and often produce confusion. The New Geneva Study Bible produces confusion, for example, when it indicates that these verses are a "description of the two stages of the Savior's ministry, rather than of His two natures," even though it immediately affirms that in the resurrection, He was "brought into a new epoch of His personal human existence (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 13:4)" (1766). It is difficult to comprehend how human existence can be separated from human nature, but this study Bible, apparently unable or unwilling to see the deification of humanity even in the person of Christ, attempts just such a separation.

We reject any characterization of our understanding of the union of the two natures of Christ as being in accord with the Eutychian understanding simply because the same term is utilized. Simple minds that come to such simple characterizations need to read deeper.

<sup>8</sup>The righteousness of faith is linked to the promise of seed (Rom. 4:13, 16-22), not to the promise of the forgiveness of sins. We are fully persuaded that God is able to carry out His operation of justification (v. 21); we need to be equally persuaded of His desire and ability to carry out His operation of deification.

<sup>9</sup>I stress declarative in the sense of the human, rather than the Christian, phenomenon known as apotheosis, briefly discussed in Kerry S. Robichaux's "That we might be made God," *Affirmation & Critique* I.3 (July 1996): 21-31. Superficial human declarations and outward religious practices have no value and matter nothing in the new creation (Gal. 6:15), the realm created by the release of the divine life, the life in the promised seed (John 12:24). They are in the realm of sight, not faith (2 Cor. 5:7).

<sup>10</sup>The significant uses of the word *seed* in Romans are discussed in the article referenced in note 4 above.

<sup>11</sup>The association of the words *like God* in Genesis 3:5 and *like the Most High* in Isaiah 14:13-14 with Satan does not, in and of itself, serve to discredit God's intention to deify His chosen and redeemed people according to the operation of His divine life and nature. Being like God is not an idea that has come up only within the corrupted mind of Satan. The apostle John, certainly no instrument of the enemy, presents the same thought in his first Epistle: "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" (3:2). Clearly, this phrase is not determinative of heresy; it is the thought behind the employment of the phrase.

When Satan spoke of being like God, he was making a claim on the Godhead. In contrast, when John spoke of being like Him, it was in the context of our being children of God who have received the divine life. This life with its divine nature has the power to conform us to the image of His Son, to bring us into His presence to see Him as He is because our intrinsic inward life and nature will fully match His.

<sup>12</sup>In contrast to this consummation, a vast majority of Christians, even those within the branches of Christianity that receive and teach deification in some form, see a consummation that falls far short of the divine intention, expecting and desiring only a physical mansion awaiting us in heaven. This unscriptural thought has so permeated Christianity that even when a teaching begins to approach the periphery of the truth of deification, it often quickly deviates into the leaven of heaven (see the April 2000 issue of *Affirmation & Critique* for a thorough critique of this concept). Robert Govett's commentary on Romans evidences this tendency well:

But now God means to have a family of sons, beloved even as Christ is; and like Him in body, in spirit, in glory,

Ambition and vainglory are not merely negative character traits. They are manifestations of the organic pattern of satanification that constitutes us all as sinners. They can be overcome only with the deifying life and nature of the Triune God.

in inheritance; dwelling as the Royal Family in the mansions Christ has gone before to prepare. How loftily does the Second Adam take His stand, together with His seed, above the first! (368)

Even though Govett sees the matter of seed and being like Christ in body, spirit, and glory, the manifestation of this seed is individualistic and largely objective. It is difficult to determine just how organic his understanding of "a family of sons" is, because he places them all within physical mansions that "Christ has gone before to prepare." Even in a subsequent passage, when he alludes to Paul's truly monumental revelation that Christ became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, the source

and means of God's divine dispensing of His life and nature, it is not clear that his understanding of life extends beyond the sense of living forever:

How different the mode of the old creation of man and of the new! "The Lord God moulded man out of the dust of the ground: and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." But Christ, raised silently from among the dead, came forth "as *the life-giving Spirit*." And therefore He will give life from the dead to multitudes innumerable. (369)

<sup>13</sup>On the eve of His crucifixion, His prayer was related to carrying out the will of God; His desire was to do the will of God (Heb. 10:7-9). When He had the assurance that the cup of the cross was the will of God, He willingly submitted (Matt. 26:39, 42).

<sup>14</sup>In His incarnation, Christ was a perfect man, yet His form was that of a slave. The Epistle to the Philippians reveals that a proper man must be a slave. The Epistle to the Romans reveals that fallen, sinful humanity is enslaved to sin. There is not enough space to detail the references to *slavery*, *slaves*, and *slave* in Romans, but it should be sufficient to point out that one is either a slave to sin or a slave to God (6:6, 17, 22). We are slaves of whom we obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness (v. 16). The slavery of sin produces corruption, but our enslavement to God, as deified humanity, proper in our position in the divine ordination, is unto eternal life (v. 22). It is quite fitting that the apostle who unveiled the organic pattern of deification in Philippians, the pattern of an obedient slave (2:7), and who presented the form of teaching that delivers one from sin when obeyed from the heart (Rom. 6:17), identified himself first as a slave (1:1). In the consummation of our deification as the New Jerusalem, we, His slaves, will serve Him (Rev. 22:3).

<sup>15</sup>Ambition and vainglory are not merely negative character traits. They are manifestations of the organic pattern of satanification that constitutes us all as sinners (Rom. 5:19). This is the reason they are obstacles, and they can be overcome only with the deifying life and nature of the Triune God.

<sup>16</sup>When a new believer is genuinely regenerated through the hearing of faith (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 5), there is an immediate, inward inclination to follow the Lord and to respond to His inward leading, in effect, to obey Him. Even though the shining of the Lord's light in His leading often is intense, exposing deeds in the flesh, but even more importantly, corrupted thoughts and intentions in the heart (Heb. 4:12), there is an inward supply of the Spirit that enables the believer to follow the Lord according to His instant leading, His anointing (1 John 2:27). This is the obedience of faith in its most subjective sense and reality. This inward inclination is the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which enables the believer to

spontaneously fulfill the righteous requirement of the law as he walks according to his human spirit that is indwelt by and mingled with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2-4). A doctrinal understanding of this operation is not a prerequisite for these experiences—this consciousness of life and its reality—even though it ultimately will help establish the new believer in the faith. Similarly, a newborn infant cannot understand or explain the reality of its life, but it is alive nonetheless.

As a new believer joyfully partakes of Christ as the tree of life through praising, singing, or testifying of his salvation, a satanic onslaught is not far behind. As Satan appeared in the garden, he surfaces both in the new believer's external environment and in the believer's untransformed thoughts that are in need of renewing (Rom. 12:2). Satan will stir up outward opposition from members of the crooked and perverted generation that is antagonistic toward the children of God who are holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:15-16). Satan also will make inward accusations related to past sins and failures (Rev. 12:10). He cares little that these have been fully covered by the blood of our Redeemer (1 Pet. 1:18-19). All of his efforts are designed to drive a new believer away from the tree of life toward the other tree.

When such opposition mounts, a new believer instinctively reaches out to other believers, especially teachers of the Word, for understanding and help. This reaching out is a normal response of the divine life for fellowship in the Body of Christ. A new believer may have no understanding of the doctrine of the Body of Christ, but the life-impulse of the divine life is corporate as well as personal. Unfortunately, many teachers, either oblivious to the truth of our organic union with Christ or afraid of "subjective" excesses, have a limited ability to nurture the sense of life at such times of spiritual need. Instead, there is a more prevailing tendency to refocus the new believer to outwardly observe the law and the various "commandments" in the Bible. He is told to obey the commandments and even shown verses that speak of obeying the commandments (Prov. 3:1; Matt. 19:17; John 14:15, 21; 1 Cor. 7:19). There is, however, little understanding of how these commandments are kept in the New Testament; the keeping of commandments is often presented as an outward obedience, almost as a work, rather than as a response that comes out of our organic union in faith. The New Geneva Study Bible, in a footnote to Romans 1:5, says, "Lit. 'obedience of faith,' indicating both the obedience that flows from faith and the fact that faith implies obedient submission to the call of God (16:26)" (1766). It stresses the latter understanding in the text of Romans 1:5, while acknowledging the former in its literal rendering.

Albert Barnes, commenting upon Philippians 2:5 concerning the mind of Christ, manages to take an intrinsically organic experience and convert it into an outward observance, a

commandment, but one that holds out no possibility of its attainment: "The *principle* in the case is, that we are to make the Lord Jesus our model, and are in all respects to frame our lives, as far as possible, in accordance with this great example" (169). Ironically, it charges us to follow Christ's pattern, but with the words *as far as possible*, it renders the principle void by suggesting two points: first, that the framing of our lives involves our self-effort and second, that our efforts ultimately will not succeed. Is there any wonder that when confronted with admonitions to obey the commandments in an outward way, new believers eventually come to Barnes's conclusion that it is not possible and give up in their pursuit of the Lord? But the obedience that is impossible in the fallen human life and nature is possible through the obedience of faith that comes out of the divine life and nature.

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