

A Continuing Look at the Gospel of John

It is good to return to the Gospel of John, not because of its seeming simplicity, but rather because of its great depth and insight into the eternal economy of our Triune God. This Gospel implicitly speaks of a divine and mystical realm, which is demonstrated in the person of Christ and then enlarged in the believers' experience, following the application of Christ's redemption and resurrection in regeneration. The mystical components of this Gospel ultimately involve the divine life in resurrection, which incorporates the believers into the Divine Trinity and consummates the scriptural revelation. Although mystical, the revelation in the Gospel of John is not esoteric and unattainable; it is an experiential and enjoyable day-by-day reality.

The record in the Gospel of John is a mystical record. This record begins and ends with the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—who is self-existing, ever-existing, and coinhering. The three of the Divine Trinity dwell in one another. The Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son. The Father is embodied in the Son, and the Son is the Father's embodiment, forming a divine and mystical realm. It is possible for the believers to enter into this divine and mystical realm because the Spirit has been consummated through the process of Christ's incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, and in this consummation the efficaciousness of Christ's process can be applied and imparted by the Spirit, who is the pneumatic Christ in resurrection.

In resurrection the divine life of the Triune God has been made available, and the Gospel of John presents a panoramic view of the operation of the divine life, first in its application to the needs of humanity and in its ability to produce an eternal building that is simply the mutual indwelling of God in redeemed and regenerated humanity. The theme of life and building is intrinsically related to the basic thought of this mystical Gospel.

Christ Himself is life—the divine, eternal, uncreated, indestructible life of God—and He came that we might have this life abundantly. The Son gives us life, and in resurrection, He lives in us as our life. The purpose of this life is to build the house of God, the Father's house, God's corporate dwelling place, the church, the Body of Christ. This house, the mutual dwelling place of God and redeemed humanity in Christ, is the fulfillment of God's

desire and deep longing for a mutual abode. This desire can be satisfied only by the church, the house of the living God, which is built in Christ with the believers on earth in this age and consummating in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and on the new earth for eternity.

With this in view, the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our redemption and to release the divine life. The Lord's death has two main aspects: a redeeming aspect and a life-releasing aspect. In the redeeming aspect of His death, the Lord Jesus died as the Lamb of God and as a serpent in form to fulfill the type of the bronze serpent. In the life-releasing aspect, He died as a grain of wheat, falling into the ground to die and bring forth many grains. The Lord's death took away our sins and released the divine life from within Him so that we could receive this life by believing into Him. The life that He released through His death, which is the life that we have received by believing into Him, is the resurrection life, and in this life we can be built together into the church, the Body of Christ, the house of the living God.

The building that the Gospel of John speaks of is a mystical building that reflects and enlarges the mystical incorporation of the Divine Trinity. John presents a very full and detailed account of the incarnate God in action on the earth, with ample self-testimony of who He actually is—the Son who incorporates the Father and the Spirit. This incorporation can be seen not only in Jesus' divine yet human living but also in the Spirit's actions to incorporate the believers into the Son and into the Father, thereby making them the reproduction, expansion, and physical continuation of the incarnate and incorporate Son of God and indeed the organism of the Triune God Himself.

The Spirit in the believers is the incorporation of the Divine Trinity. We will be far off the mark if we accept the commonly held view that the Spirit dwells in the believers as the separate but most faithful representative of God the Father and God the Son. Nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing could be closer to base tritheism. Instead, just as the distinct act of one always incorporated the operation of the other two in the life of the Son as a man on the earth, the Spirit's action to indwell and move within the believers manifests the operations of all three of the Godhead.

The Johannine Jesus, consequently, serves as the organic bridge for the incorporation of the believers into the Divine Trinity. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John portrays Jesus not firstly as a model for the believers' living but as an organically real realm of incorporation with the Divine Trinity. All that believers do for God is done out of this incorporation into God. Our identity and activity as the Body of Christ is not a matter of representation; rather, we can and must live and move through the operations of the Divine Trinity within us, taking the Son of God and of Man as our organic bridge to the Triune God and His actions.

The Gospel of John also presents Jesus as the model of a human being who lived absolutely and completely in incorporation with the Divine Trinity. While this Gospel emphasizes that God is incarnate as Jesus, we should never lose sight of the fact that here is a genuine human being. Jesus was really a man in all aspects, and as a human being, He lived out the incorporation in which He participated. His life is a model for the incorporation of the believers into the Divine Trinity. No one can live out the model of this incorporation apart from the reality of Jesus as the bridge in this incorporation. While we may admire the details of the Johannine Jesus as the model for this incorporation, He must be the actual organic bridge into this incorporation if we, as His modern-day disciples and Body, are to be in and are to live out this divine-human incorporation.

It is possible for us to live in this divine and mystical realm of incorporation because God in His economy has been processed and consummated as the Spirit, which speaks to the consummation of the Scriptures. According to the Lord's word in John 7:38 and John's subsequent interpretation of the Lord's speaking in verse 39, the Scriptures consummate in a union of God and redeemed humanity, a union that is manifested through an intrinsic, organic abiding in the divine life that mirrors the fellowship within the Triune God and extends that fellowship to include all of those who believe into Him. In this union there is a continuous dispensing of the divine life, which the Lord characterizes as rivers of living water that flow out from the believers and which John associates with the Spirit who was not yet. Both the union and the dispensing of the divine life are the issue of an economical process involving the incarnation of the Word and the resurrection and glorification of Christ, which consummates in the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet.

The words of the Lord and John reveal the consummation of God's economy in the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet. This revelation occurs in a divinely ordained setting of consummation, it comes through a consummate declaration by the Lord Himself, it reflects the

consummate framework for scriptural interpretation, it depicts the consummate experience of the believers, it points to the consummate unveiling of the Triune God, it speaks of the process that consummates this economy, and it foreshadows the corporate consummation of God's economy in the New Jerusalem. These verses also speak of the economic process that accomplished this economy, a process involving both the entrance of the Triune God into history through the incarnation of the Son and His continuing presence in history through the resurrection and glorification of Christ as the Spirit who was not yet.

In the continuing presence of the consummated Spirit in human history, there is the opportunity for an enjoyable and day-by-day experience of the divine life which will build and incorporate us into the consummate realm of God's building, the enlargement of the divine incorporation that is the Triune God Himself. With regard to a proper daily Christian life, the Gospel of John shows us that Christ is not only our life but also the daily necessities of our Christian life. Just as our human life must be maintained for our physical health, the divine life in our spirit must be maintained for our spiritual health. All of the necessities for the maintenance of our spiritual life are Christ Himself. Christ is our real, divine, and spiritual air for us to breathe, our water for us to drink, our food for us to eat, and our dwelling place in which we can abide. All of these items must be our day-by-day experience—we need to breathe Him, drink Him, eat Him, and abide in Him day by day, even moment by moment.

When we thus enjoy Him, we will be renewed day by day, the divine light will shine brighter and brighter, we will be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, we will go from strength to strength, we will receive grace upon grace, and we will enter into our divine inheritance little by little. This daily enjoyment depends upon simple life practices, including contacting the Lord morning by morning, reading the Bible daily to receive its spiritual supply here a little and there a little, speaking forth of the riches of Christ one by one in proper meetings of the church, and meeting with the saints from house to house.

We need to ask the Lord to grant us to live such a normal Christian life for a normal church life. Then each of our days will be worth a thousand years with the Lord, He will restore to us the years that we have wasted, and we will have a daily living that is a memorial to God for His eternal purpose to build up the church as the Body of Christ, consummating in the New Jerusalem.

Yes, the Gospel of John is mystical, but we can continue in these things in simplicity.

by the Editors