

# The Operation of the Incorporate Triune God in the Life, Living, and Work of the Church as the Body of Christ (1)

by Kerry S. Robichaux

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)*

In the two issues of this journal in 2004, I presented a study of the Gospel of John from the perspective of what was termed incorporation (“Johannine [1]”; “Johannine [2]”). In those articles, by *incorporation* I intended to denote the operations of the three of the Divine Trinity in the manifest actions of Christ during His earthly ministry. The conclusion I came to, and hopefully affirmed persuasively, is that the more subtle message of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is not simply the incarnate Son of God who moved and acted for God’s interests during His earthly sojourn but more intrinsically the incarnate Son of God who incorporates the operations of the Father and of the Spirit in His every manifest action during His earthly ministry. Hence, the Jesus of the Gospel of John is not the incarnation of the Son of God separate from the Father and the Spirit, as many Christians today may casually understand, but the incarnation of the Son as the incorporation of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The term *incorporation*, adopted from Witness Lee (*Issue 21-22, 24-26, 40-42*) and as applied in my two previous articles, is used to describe the action of any one of the three of the Godhead that manifests the operation of another one or the other two. Perhaps only one verse from the Gospel of John will suffice here to illustrate the point I was attempting to make in those two articles. In John 14:10 the Lord Jesus said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.” Here two discrete aspects of the relationship between the Son and the Father are explicitly referred to, and one is implied. These three aspects more finely define what I wish to describe by the term *incorporation*. The implied aspect is one of mutual interdependence of existence,

whereby the Son is the Son and can act as the Son because there is a Father in the Godhead, and the Father is the Father and can act as the Father because there is a Son in the Godhead. In terms of classical (Latin) theology this mutual interdependence of existence is called coinherence, or circuminsession. Explicitly, John 14:10 refers to the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father: “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” This aspect of incorporation is more technically called perichoresis (Greek for “mutual interpenetration”) in Greek theology and circuminsession in Latin thought. Here the point is not a mutual interdependence of existence but a mutual interpenetration of hypostases and a dynamic fellowship in the divine life that exists among the three of the Trinity. Finally, John 14:10 explicitly refers to the hidden mutual operation of the Father in the open actions of the Son on the earth. When the Son spoke openly on the earth, He did so by virtue not of His own operation solely but also of the operation of His heavenly Father who abides in Him. The Son’s action of speaking, and the effectual benefit of His speaking, occurred because the Father operated (“does His works”). This mutual operation of the three in every action of any one of the Divine Trinity is no doubt the most obvious aspect of incorporation to be found in the Gospel of John, because so much of the Gospel of John relates to the actions of the Son, but it should certainly be the case that the mutual operation of the three in the Godhead manifests and depends on the other two aspects of incorporation—circuminsession (coinherence) and circuminsession (perichoresis).

In the second of my articles on incorporation, I also detailed from the Gospel of John the actions of the Spirit to incorporate the operations of the Son and of the Father (“Johannine [2]” 15-21) and, further, the experiences of the believers to incorporate the operations of the entire Divine Trinity in their Christian and church life (“Johannine [2]” 21-32). Of particular interest was the Spirit’s actions to incorporate the believers into the

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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. Hence, I examined a number of texts in the Gospel of John that describe the believers as the incorporation of the Triune God. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John has much to say about the relationship between the Spirit and the Son after the Lord's resurrection and ascension in the life of the Christian church. While the Synoptics are quite limited in their descriptions regarding the Spirit in the post-resurrection church (e.g., Matt. 10:20; 12:31-32; 28:19; Mark 3:29; 13:11; Luke 12:10, 12), not to mention His relationship to the Son in this period, the Gospel of John is markedly vocal about the Spirit in the post-resurrection church. This is, in fact, one of the features that distinguishes this Gospel from the Synoptics. Further, its comments about the Spirit in the life of the believers offer fascinating details regarding the Spirit's relationship to the Son. These details are, I believe, crucial to a proper understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in the Epistles and in a theology of the New Testament as a whole. Unfortunately, many studies concerning the relationship between Christ and the Spirit fail to include the intricate foundation that is laid in the Gospel of John. I submit that many difficulties in the Epistles that involve the relationship between Christ and the Spirit—e.g., Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18—are alleviated when the view of this relationship in the Gospel of John is brought to bear on the issues, and thus, I was quite interested to probe this relationship in my last article. Having so probed, I am naturally quite interested in seeing how indeed this relationship actually develops in the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles, and thus, a new series of articles is suggested by this interest, this one being the first.

**I**n turning to Acts and the Epistles, I wish to extend what I did in the Gospel of John; that is, I hope to gather as many textual indications as I can find of the incorporation of the operations of the Divine Trinity in the manifest actions of the three of the Trinity or of the New Testament believers, including the apostles. Hence, I wish to consider discretely, from Acts and the Epistles, the actions of the Son, the actions of the Spirit, and the actions of the believers, including the apostles, insofar as they manifest the incorporated operations of the Divine Trinity. And this suggests an organization for this next group of articles. In this first article I hope to demonstrate that in the life of the New Testament church the actions of Christ Jesus the Lord manifest primarily the operations of God to carry out God's economy. Further, I wish to show that to a limited degree the activities of Christ, spoken of in Acts and the Epistles, manifest the

operations of the Spirit as well. Typically, after the resurrection of Christ, we find that the Spirit manifests the operations of Christ, but in some few instances in Acts and the Epistles, we also find Christ spoken of as manifestly acting by the Spirit's operation. In later articles I hope to consider from Acts and the Epistles the activities of the Spirit that incorporate the operations of the Father and the Son, the work and ministry of the apostles that incorporate the operations of the Divine Trinity, and the life and living of the New Testament believers that also incorporate the operations of the Divine Trinity.

After spending some months preparing for these next articles, reading from Acts through the Epistle of Jude as carefully as I was able to, I am quite struck with how pervasive the incorporation of the Triune God is in the thought and writing of the New Testament authors. Certainly, this notion is not the explicit topic of much of what they write, but it is astounding how fully they interweave the operations of the Triune God into their descriptions of how Christ, the Spirit, the apostles, and the common believers function in the church as the Body of Christ. My deep impression after reading Acts and the Epistles is that, according to the New Testament, the operations of the Triune God are paramount to the identity of the church in life and service. As I hope I have shown in the earthly ministry of Christ from the Gospel of John, in Acts and the Epistles we see not only the incorporation of the Divine Trinity in the actions of the divine persons but also the church's participation in, enjoyment of, and own activity by this divine incorporation. In these articles, by extending my exploration of this divine incorporation into Acts and the Epistles, my intention is to suggest a way of Christian and church life that is intrinsically interwoven with the incorporate operations of the Divine Trinity and which thereby manifests the Divine Trinity corporately and visibly. Like the common, natural, and false notions regarding the Trinity that are held today, the concept of the Christian life that many believers today hold to and live by is shallow and commonplace, portraying the believer as someone who lives and acts in a purely ethical realm and who faintly represents God somehow. To many Christians this is the essence of the Christian life, and to suggest anything more than this is foreign and undesirable. But it seems that the writers of the New Testament speak of the believers in an altogether mystical way, describing them as the very extension of the incorporation that Christ was when He was on the earth in the flesh. It appears that in the view of the New Testament writers the believers are not independent ethical agents of God on earth, representing Him—usually poorly—to a world that is inferior to them in demeanor and behavior. Rather, the believers are to live, act, and even exist by the operations of the Divine Trinity within them. This is what I hope to establish in this series of articles.

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A short word on Acts and the Epistles as the scope of this series of articles is probably in order. Some readers may take exception to such a massive clumping of text for my study, as I seem to be flying in the face of all accepted distinctions of genre and authorship. But I am after a singular notion here, which I believe belongs to the culture of the New Testament writers and is not the “intellectual property” of any one writer or the characteristic of any one genre of the New Testament. I do not deny that there are individual strands of thought among the various New Testament writers, and in my articles on the Gospel of John, in contradistinction to the Synoptic Gospels, I implicitly acknowledged such, in that I described a “Johannine Jesus.” But I feel that what I am touching on in these articles is not particularly Johannine, Pauline, Petrine, or other, but more generally, new-testamental. Thus, I wish to suggest that behind the differences in presentation that we find among the New Testament writers there is a core understanding and experience in living and labor that these authors, almost casually, interweave into their written utterance. This core is, I submit, their understanding and experience of the one reality of the Triune God operating in their life and labors, and this transcends their human differences. It is, as it were, their common background “culture” of God’s operation in their lives and labors. This assumption underlies the whole of my presentation in this article and the articles to come.



**The operations of the Triune God are paramount to the identity of the church in life and service. In Acts and the Epistles we see not only the incorporation of the Divine Trinity in the actions of the divine persons but also the church’s participation in, enjoyment of, and own activity by this divine incorporation.**

As I have done previously, in this article I will adopt a catalog-and-commentary format in which I will present groups of verses arranged by similar theme and, following each group, some comments which I hope will bring out the qualities of the incorporation of the Divine Trinity as it relates to Christ’s person and work. In each group I will arrange the verses thematically and not necessarily in the order in which they appear in Acts and the Epistles.

### **Christ’s Incorporation of God**

After Christ’s resurrection and ascension, when He had accomplished redemption and passed from His earthly ministry into His heavenly ministry, a new age in the economy of God ensued in which God’s operation expanded to include the believers in Christ. During Christ’s earthly ministry His followers had been merely that, followers; but through His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ’s followers have now become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and partners of Christ (Heb. 3:14; 1:9), being regenerated by God (1 Pet. 1:3) and indwelt by Christ through His Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11). Now God operates not solely from the heavens and out-

side of human beings, as He did in the Old Testament, nor mainly in the humanity and visible person of Jesus Christ, as He did in the Gospels, but corporately in the many believers of Christ in the church as Christ’s Body. The New Testament record from the Acts of the Apostles to the Epistle of Jude presents this new age in God’s operation, and in this part of its record we see the details of how God operates in Christ, the Spirit, and the New Testament believers to carry out His marvelous economy for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. Further, in reading Acts through Jude, we discover that the understanding of the Triune God’s operation in Christ, the Spirit, and the believers forms a rich common background for the writers of these New Testament books, and this understanding often surfaces in their utterance as gems of truth concerning the Triune God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament believers, including themselves as apostles and co-workers with God. The first group of gems that we should consider are those that relate to Christ in His incorporation of the operation of God. The New Testament writers obviously realized that their Savior Christ was central to God’s economy, but more deeply they understood that Christ’s

activity incorporated the operations of God. Certainly they believed that Christ was, in Himself, God; but more finely they realized that when Christ acted, He acted not just in His own person but with and in the operation of God His Father. In the sections that follow below, we will consider Christ’s incorporation of God in His person and varied actions for God’s economy, as it is related in Acts and the Epistles.

### ***Incorporation in the Divine Existence***

While Acts through Jude are intensely practical books, the writers of these books nevertheless held deeply theological notions about the Christ whom they believed in. The first group of verses below expresses a basic understanding of the incorporation of God in Christ.

*In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell. (Col. 1:19)*

*In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (2:9)*

In the understanding of the apostles, at least as far as we

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have it expressed by Paul here, Christ incorporated in His own being all that is God. While some in the Gentile churches, under the influence of nascent Gnosticism, suspected that Christ was merely one of many emanations from God that comprised what they termed a fullness, and thus, less than God Himself, Paul withheld no boldness in turning the term *fullness* on its head and declaring that all that was God was in Christ, not simply in His eternal existence, as Colossians 1:19 may more generally be understood to mean, but also in His physical and manifest incarnation in time, as Colossians 2:9 seems to point to. The fullness that Christ incorporates in Himself is more precisely the expression of all that God is, not simply the whole content of the Godhead but more accurately the overflowing abundance of the Godhead in expression, as the Greek word *pleroma* seems to connote. It is, of course, uniquely Christ's role and function in the Divine Trinity to be the expression of the Godhead, and in other places in the New Testament the apostles relate their further realizations about Christ as the expression of God.

*Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:4)*

*Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation. (Col. 1:15)*

*The image of Him who created him. (3:10)*

*Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance. (Heb. 1:3)*

In the portions above we find finer nuances of Christ's identity in the Godhead. He is the image of God, that is, the manifest expression of God, whether in a physical sense, with reference primarily to His humanity as in Colossians 1:15, or in an inner trinitarian sense, with reference to His eternal character in the Godhead as in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 3:10. The invisible God is imaged only by Christ, the Son of God, and in doing so, He incorporates in His own being and action all that the invisible God is and does. This is, no doubt, an eternal reality, but before the incarnation Christ's incorporation of God as the image of God was not evident, even if it was indeed the reality. Through the incarnation and through the revelation given to the apostles, Christ's incorporate role as the image of God became known and has been declared.

The writer of Hebrews expands on this notion by offering even more descriptive language concerning Christ's incorporate identity in the divine existence, declaring that the Son is—the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His substance. Glory is the singular attribute of God in expression, and Christ is the shining forth of God in this attribute, again physically in incarnation but even more so eternally within the Divine Trinity. But on a much deeper level the writer here notices that

Christ is intrinsically the expressive evidence of God in His divine nature and reality. The reality of what God is in His divine nature, His *hypostasis* as the writer of Hebrews here terms it, is, by metaphor, impressed in the person of the Son, and Christ the Son exists eternally as the express image of the reality that is God. The utterance here in Hebrews 1:3 carefully respects the distinctions between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, but at the same time it makes clear that the realization of God the Father is the very character of the identity of the Son. Hence, Christ the Son is not only the image of God but also the expressed reality of God, incorporating God in His own existence and action.

Finally, from this most basic perspective of the divine existence, we have a comment about the Son's incorporation of the Father from the apostle John in his first Epistle.

*Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who confesses the Son has the Father also. (2:23)*

While the Son and the Father are certainly distinct in existence, in the teaching of the apostles and the experience of the believers, to deny the Son is to forego the knowledge and experience of the Father, and likewise, to confess the Son is to acknowledge the existence and reality of the Father. For all practical purposes, then, to have the Father, one must have the Son, and this, because the Son incorporates the Father. But on further reflection we can also see that in John's thought, while it is the Father whom we as believers should have as the focus of our experience, it is only the confession of the Son that can bring us that experience. Hence, there is the indication that we believers should possess some realization about the Son incorporating the Father and that this realization should form the basis for our fundamental confession as Christians. It is indeed unfortunate that few Christians today have this deeper understanding of the relationship of the Son with the Father and have fallen back onto a natural understanding that is tritheistic in all but name. John encourages us to confess the Son with the understanding that the Son brings us the Father, that is, incorporates the Father in the divine existence.

### *Incorporation in God's Eternal Purpose*

It is from Acts and the Epistles that we understand clearly that God has an eternal purpose (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9), and two key texts indicate that God's purpose is formed and accomplished through His operation in Christ:

*According to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:11)*

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*Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him. (1:10)*

Paul tells the Ephesians that God made His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. The sense here is that God operated not just to form His eternal purpose but also to carry it out, and this operation is done in Christ. It is not difficult to see how God's purpose is carried out in Christ since we know how central Christ's activities are to the fulfillment of God's eternal plan. Christ's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, ascension, lordship, and heavenly ministry all demonstrate His centrality in the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. Paul's comment here helps us realize that in all these activities God was in operation in Christ, that Christ's activities incorporated God's operations for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. However, it is less apparent how God first formed His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, as the Greek verb here in Ephesians 3:11 probably also denotes. This may be something that belongs more to divine mystery than to human understanding, but certainly the Son as the expression of God, indeed His very Logos, would have been central in the forming of God's eternal plan. Purpose more properly belongs to the operation of the Father, but we should expect that the expression of that purpose, the making of it, involves the Son as the Logos of God.



**I**n actual content, God's eternal purpose is His plan to head up all things in Christ, as Paul indicates in Ephesians 1:10. There has been considerable discussion among the expositors about the meaning of the Greek verb that is translated "to head up" here, and the English versions vary in their rendering of this graphic Greek word ("head up," "gather together," "sum up," "unite," "bring together under one head"). But it is difficult not to note that the root of the Greek word is "head," and it seems likely that Paul is alluding to the notion of Christ as Head, first, of the Body and, ultimately, of all things in the universe for the sake of the Body (cf. vv. 22-23). But regardless of the exact sense of the Greek verb here, it is God who purposed to head up all things in Christ; hence, we see again God's operation in Christ. According to His economy—and here the Greek word *oikonomia* is explicitly mentioned—which will be consummated once the ages of time have been fully completed, God will head up all things in the universe by operating in Christ and making Him the Head of all things. As such, Christ will incorporate the actions of God to fulfill the economy which He has purposed from eternity.

## ***Incorporation in God's Creating of the Universe***

The Bible typically speaks of God, without differentiation of His triune existence, as the Creator (Eccl. 12:1; Isa. 40:28; 43:15; Rom. 1:25; 1 Pet. 4:19), but in the Epistles we see that God created the universe through His operation in Christ.

*Because in Him [i.e., the Son of v. 13] all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him. (Col. 1:16)*

*God...has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things, through whom also He made the universe. (Heb. 1:1-2)*

*By faith we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not come into being out of things which appear. (11:3)*

Colossians 1:16 speaks of God's activity of creation,

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which was done in Christ. Although God is not explicitly mentioned in this verse, He is clearly implied by the passive voice verb. God is the unstated agent of creation, and He operated in Christ, that is, through Christ as the active instrument ("through Him") and by virtue of Christ's divine power ("in Him"). "All things were created in the power of what Christ is. All creation bears the characteristics of Christ's intrinsic power" (Recovery Version, Col. 1:16, note 1). While the first of the Divine Trinity certainly acted to create the universe and all that is in it, He did so through and in the second of the Divine Trinity. Similar utterance for the same notion is found in Hebrews 1:2, but here God has been explicitly mentioned as the agent, and the Son is again referred to as the active instrument ("through whom"). These verses (along with John 1:3) point to the fact that in creation Christ incorporated the operation of God to bring all things into being, but the Bible does not give details of Christ's precise activity in creation. However, Hebrews 11:3 gives us some hint in saying that "the universe has been framed by the word of God," alluding no doubt to the creative "sayings" of God in Genesis (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) as well as to the unique identity of the Son of God as the

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Logos. Thus, when God spoke the creation into being, He operated in the power and through the instrumentality of the Son as His Word.

### *Incorporation of God in Human Living*

The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles detail the activity of Christ in resurrection within His believers and in the church as His Body, but the writers of these books often refer to the life of Christ during His earthly ministry, especially as part of the gospel that they present and review. Here also they sometimes make clear that in His human living on earth Christ incorporated the operations of God.

*And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us. (1 John 1:2)*

*God...has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son. (Heb. 1:1-2)*

*Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)*

*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man shown by God to you to be approved by works of power and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, even as you yourselves know. (2:22)*

John in his first Epistle speaks of Christ as the eternal life that was manifested through incarnation and human living. He also points out that this manifest eternal life was with the Father, echoing his similar statement in his Gospel (John 1:1-2) but here referring it not to Christ's preternatural existence in the Godhead but to His incarnate existence in creation and in time. As Christ lived and moved among humankind, He was with the Father in existence and action; hence, His actions incorporated the operations of the Father at all times. In a very real sense John's parenthetical comment here in 1 John 1:2 is a précis of the entire Gospel of John, in that his Gospel presents Christ as the eternal life, who in incarnation lived and acted with the Father and as His incorporation in life and operation. The writer of Hebrews speaks in a somewhat similar fashion, referring to the incarnation of Christ and His presence among humankind, both physically during His past earthly ministry and spiritually in His current heavenly ministry, as the operation of God to speak to us in the New Testament age "in the Son" (1:2).

In Acts Peter twice speaks of Christ's activities in His human living as the incorporation of God's operation. In

his gospel message to Gentile recipients in the household of Cornelius, he declares that Jesus "went about doing good and healing...for God was with Him" (10:38). Similar to John's language mentioned above, this word indicates that while Jesus was the manifest agent of the good works and healing acts which were done during His earthly ministry, God was in operation with Him. In an earlier gospel message, this time to Jewish recipients, Peter more pointedly speaks of the incorporation of God in the activities of Jesus, saying that God showed His approval of Jesus by operating through Him to perform works of power and wonders and signs (2:22). Peter's listeners knew of the wondrous deeds that Jesus the Nazarene accomplished among them; what they did not know, and what was the essence of Peter's message and the gospel to them, was that God was doing those wondrous deeds through Him. Again, Jesus was manifestly the agent of the wondrous deeds, and God was incorporated in Jesus and operated through Him.

### *Incorporation in Dying to Accomplish God's Redemption and Reconciliation*

Perhaps the one action of Christ that many Christians believe was solely His operation is His death on the cross to accomplish redemption. Certainly it is the Son who became a man and died a vicarious death; He, not the Father or the Spirit, is distinctly the agent of the incarnation, death, and resurrection for our redemption and justification. But many Christians today wrongly believe that Christ died on the cross separate from the Father and the Spirit. Rather, as with all His activities, both as the eternal Son of God and incarnated as a man in time, He incorporated the operations of the Father and the Spirit when He died on the cross, thus preserving, even here, the principle that every manifest action of one of the Divine Trinity is an operation of all three of the Divine Trinity. In the Epistles this operation of God is mentioned, and here we should take note of it. In a later article we will examine the operation of the Spirit in the death of Christ.

*Wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. (Col. 2:14)*

*Abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace. (Eph. 2:15)*

*That which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh. (Rom. 8:3)*

*All things are out from God, who has reconciled us to*

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*Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)*

In his Epistle to the Colossians Paul unveils that at the crucifixion of Christ more was going on than simply the death of a man or even of the God-man. While the Son of God was doing His great labor of dying for our redemption, the Father was likewise in operation, doing what only He as the righteous Judge could do—“wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us.” It is quite striking that Paul here uses the expression *nailing it to the cross* to describe God’s operation to annul the law in ordinances. On the one hand, Christ was manifestly nailed to the cross; on the other hand, in the same action God operated to nail the ordinances of the law on the cross for their own demise. It should not be thought that the ordinances were mystically nailed to the cross as something separate from Christ in the flesh, for in Ephesians 2:15 Paul says of the same action that in His flesh Christ abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances. Thus, the flesh of Christ served as the “carrier” for the law of the commandments in ordinances, and the Father Himself nailed the ordinances to the cross in the nailing of Christ to the cross. This action of abolishing the ordinances against us is viewed by Paul as an action of Christ in Ephesians 2:15 and as an operation of God in Colossians 2:14, and because of this, we can see that even in His dying on the cross for our redemption, Christ incorporated the operation of God.

In Romans 8:3 Paul views the operation of God in the death of Christ from a slightly different perspective, here focusing not on the ordinances in the law but on the sin in the flesh. But as with the ordinances in the law, the flesh of Christ provided the means by which God could operate on the sin in the flesh. We should note Paul’s careful use of the phrase *likeness of the flesh of sin*, by which he strongly implies that in Christ there was no sin. Nevertheless, Christ’s flesh served as the “carrier” which God could operate on to condemn sin in the flesh. Here again the death of Christ is seen as an operation of God, and again in this sense Christ is seen to be incorporating God’s operation in His dying on the cross. Finally, we should note that Paul speaks of Christ’s whole mission of incarnation and death as God’s sending of His own Son; thus, the Son’s coming in the likeness of the flesh of sin was at the same time God’s sending of the Son, again an

indication that Christ incorporated the operation of God in His activities for our redemption.

Based on Christ’s redemption, we who have believed in Christ have been reconciled to God (Rom. 5:8-11), and the reconciliation that we enjoy is presented by Paul as an operation of God that was incorporated in Christ’s actions to die on the cross (2 Cor. 5:18-19). When God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ,” what was manifest was the action of Christ going to the cross to die, but Paul perceived the deeper operation of God and characterized Christ’s action more finely: “namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them.” Christ’s action to incorporate the operation of God is clearly expressed here in relation to the reconciliation of the world to God.

### *Incorporation in Resurrection by God*

As central to our Christian faith as our confession that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) is the assurance that Christ rose from the dead for our justification before



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God (Rom. 4:25). In Acts and the Epistles Christ’s resurrection is viewed as both His own action to rise from the dead (Acts 10:41; 1 Thes. 4:14) and as God’s operation to raise Him from the dead (Acts 10:40; 2:24, 32; 13:34; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:15; Gal. 1:1; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:21). This fact alone points to the incorporation of God’s operation in Christ’s activity. In reality, the resurrection of Christ was both His own action and God’s distinct operation. But apart from this indication in the overall presentation of the resurrection in Acts and the Epistles, there are also some specific passages where Christ is shown to incorporate the Father’s operation in resurrecting from the dead.

*Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it. (Acts 2:24)*

*What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies. (Eph. 1:19-20)*

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*Indeed He was crucified out of weakness, but He lives by the power of God. For indeed we are weak in Him, but we will live together with Him by the power of God directed toward you. (2 Cor. 13:4)*

**P**eter in his first gospel message to the Jews declares that God raised Jesus from the dead, clearly asserting the operation of God in the resurrection. But in the same breath he points out that it was not possible for Jesus to be held by death, implying that by virtue of His own identity Jesus had to rise from the dead. The emphasis here is plainly on the operation of God, but Christ Jesus is not presented as simply the passive beneficiary of that operation; instead, Peter is careful to note that Jesus, who is just as fully God as the Father who raised Him, could not Himself remain in death, and on the basis of this statement alone, we can surmise that in the resurrection, while God operated to raise Him, Jesus Himself rose from the dead.

Paul likewise speaks of Christ's resurrection from the dead as an incorporation of God's operation, and in Ephesians 1:19-20 he is quite direct about it. Here he uses the Greek words *energeia* (noun, "operation") and *energo* (verb, "caused to operate") to denote the work of God in (Gk. *en* + *ergon*) the person of Christ in raising Him from the dead. What is manifest (to faith!) as the resurrection of Christ is inwardly the operation of the might of the strength of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory (v. 17), which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead. In 2 Corinthians Paul further declares that Christ "was crucified out of weakness, but He lives by the power of God" (13:4), referring in this last clause to both Christ's resurrection and His ongoing life in resurrection. Here Christ is the manifest agent, but again His activity is by the operation of God in power. Of course, there is more to Paul's statement here. In fact, the main point relates to the apostles' experience of the operations of God and Christ, but comment on this is something we will reserve for a later article in this series.

### ***Incorporation in Being Lord at God's Right Hand***

Throughout Acts and the Epistles Christ is described as being at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-34; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22), usually seated but in one rare instance standing (Acts 7:55-56). *The right hand of God* denotes a place of high honor with supreme authority and is a common formula used to refer to the lordship of Christ. But the term should not be understood in merely a physical way. Rather, a deeper significance lies in the relationship in action that comes with being at the right hand of God. It is interesting to note that in the visions of the book of Revelation Christ is seen as incorporated with

the Father on the one throne of God (3:21; 22:1, 3), and this helps us to understand that Christ's being at the right hand of God refers to His incorporation of the Father for the carrying out of His commission as Lord of all (Acts 10:36). Because He is at the right of God, Christ is able to act for and with God in all matters, executing God's ultimate authority not only *at* but also *as* His right hand. In Christ, God the Father operates to carry out His administration of all things for the fulfillment of His purpose, and in this sense it can be said that the Father has given all things into the hand of the Son (John 3:35), who is at His right hand.

### ***Incorporation in Carrying Out God's Judgment of the World***

Christ has been designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; 1 Pet. 4:5; John 5:22, 27), but His judgment will, in fact, incorporate the operation of the Father God, who is also said to be Judge (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 5:13; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 1:17).

*Because He has set a day in which He is to judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has designated, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)*

*In the day when God judges the secrets of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ. (Rom. 2:16)*

**I**n his gospel message to the Areopagites, Paul made clear that God will judge the world, but He will do so by the man Jesus Christ, and to the Romans he said much the same, declaring that God will judge even the secrets of human hearts through Jesus Christ. In both places God is presented as the Judge, but from the descriptions given, we are led to understand that the manifestation of that judgment will be in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence, Christ, in judging the living and the dead, will incorporate the operation of God as Judge.

### ***Incorporation of God in Working through the Apostles***

In the sections above we have examined Christ's incorporation of God in His own activities as recorded in Acts and the Epistles. Now let us turn to examine His activities in His believers that incorporate God's operation as we find them mentioned in Acts and the Epistles. The first group of these relate to Christ's activities in the apostles. In this article and in the ones to follow, I will distinguish between the actions of the apostles and the experiences of the believers, even though the apostles are often presented as patterns for the believers (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thes. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 2:7). The distinction seems to be justified by the New Testament record, in which the

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apostles are set first to enter into God's economy (1 Cor. 12:28) and then to bring the believers in the churches into a similar experience. Although Christ's work for God's economy results in the building up of His Body by all the members His Body, He uses the gifted ones, first of which are the apostles, to bring the believers into this building work (Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19). It is also significant that the New Testament devotes a large portion of its record, about 13 percent, by both verse and word counts in the Greek text, to "the Acts of the Apostles." Finally, in the Epistles, and especially those of Paul, there is significant testimony about the apostles' living and work in contradistinction to the living and work of the common believers. Hence, in my presentation in this series of articles, I will generally treat the biblical portions that relate to the apostles separately from those that relate to the common believers.

*He has charged us to proclaim to the people and solemnly testify that this is the One who was designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. (Acts 10:42)*

*When Peter saw this, he replied to the people, Men of Israel, why are you marveling at this? Or why are you gazing at us, as though by our own power or godliness we have made him walk? The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus... And upon faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you behold and know; and the faith which is through Him has given him this wholeness of health before you all. (3:12-13, 16)*

*While stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may take place through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus. (4:30)*

*Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6)*

*All things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation. (5:18-19)*

*Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ and manifests the savor of the knowledge of Him through us in every place. (2:14)*

*We are not like the many, adulterating the word of God for profit; but as out of sincerity, but as out of God, before God we speak in Christ. (v. 17)*

*I have therefore my boasting in Christ Jesus in the things pertaining to God. (Rom. 15:17)*

**P**eter told the house of Cornelius that God had charged the apostles to proclaim to the people that Jesus Christ was designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. But when, in point of fact, did God so charge them? This apparently occurred during the times of Christ's post-resurrectional appearances to the disciples (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:2-3; cf. 1 Cor. 15:5), when charge was given to them to go forth and proclaim the gospel. While Peter's testimony here refers actually to the actions of Christ, he explicitly mentions the operation of God. Hence, in his mind Christ's actions to give the apostles charge to proclaim the gospel incorporated the operation of God, and, therefore, Peter could testify boldly that God had charged them.

Earlier in the book of Acts, the apostles Peter and John



**Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection from the dead as an incorporation of God's operation. What is manifest as the resurrection of Christ is inwardly the operation of the might of the strength of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead.**

came across a man who had been lame from birth and was at one of the doors of the temple begging. Rather than offer the man alms, they healed him in Jesus' name, an action which attracted a large crowd and opened the door for Peter to speak of God's operation in the healing action. Of course, the apostles' healing action was itself an incorporation of the operation of God, and we will return to this point in a later article, but in the divine operation of that healing, there is another, deeper incorporation of God in Jesus Christ. "The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus...And upon faith in His name, His name has made this man strong" (3:13, 16). Thus, Jesus Christ operated in the healing of the lame man ("His name has made this man strong"), and in Christ's operation God operated to heal the lame man so that He could glorify His Servant Jesus. What we read here in Acts 3 turns out to be a typical description of the actions of the apostles and the experiences of the believers throughout Acts and the Epistles. Often the living and work of the apostles and believers are described as an operation of Christ, or as an operation of the Spirit, or as an operation of Christ in the Spirit, and in that operation the Father

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God operates, thus making the living and work of the apostles and believers a fully incorporate operation of the Triune God. A similar description of incorporation is given in Acts 4:30, where the prayer of the church for boldness to speak in the face of mounting persecution is recounted (v. 29). Again, the manifest actions of healing and of performing signs and wonders were to be done by the apostles. But it was the operation of God that was to make their actions effectual, and more deeply it was in His holy Servant Jesus that God's operation was to take place; thus, in the apostles' manifest work Christ incorporated the operation of God and gave their manifest work its divine effectiveness.

**I**n Paul's mystical characterization of his preaching of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:6), we again see Christ's incorporation of God's operation in the manifest actions of the apostles. Again, there are a few levels of incorporation to be noted in this verse, and some of these we will examine in later articles, but here we should notice that the essence of the gospel is the illumination of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that is, Christ incorporates the shining forth of God in glory in Christ's function to become personally present, through faith, in the preaching of the gospel.

The glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ is the God of glory expressed through Jesus Christ, and it is Jesus Christ, who is the effulgence of the glory of God (Heb. 1:3); to know Him is to know the God of glory. (Recovery Version, 2 Cor. 4:6, note 5)

Thus, in the apostles' work to preach the gospel, Christ operates, according to one of His most basic functions in the Godhead, to incorporate God in glory, a function of His that we examined in an earlier section.

In the next chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of the ministry of reconciliation, which the apostles received from God (5:18-19), and again here we see Christ's incorporation of God in the actions of the apostles. In a previous section we saw that the action of reconciling the world to God was an action by Christ that incorporated the operation of God. But God did more than reconcile the world to Himself; He also gave the apostles the ministry of reconciliation so that the reconciliation which He obtained through and in Christ's incorporation could be declared and applied to all those who believe in Christ. Here where Paul describes the incorporate action of God in Christ to reconcile the world, he also testifies that God gave the apostles the ministry of reconciliation, the word of reconciliation, through and in Christ. "God in Christ" was not only reconciling the world but also putting in the apostles the word of reconciliation, as the parallel grammatical structure of the Greek sentence indicates here. How this spiritual operation is actually manifested again

involves levels of incorporation—with the apostles speaking the word of reconciliation as the gospel and the teaching in the church (cf. v. 20), with Christ operating in their speaking to reconcile the hearers to God, and with God operating in Christ to reconcile them to Himself. Apart from this incorporation the actions of the apostles would have no efficacy and thus no merit, and apart from this incorporation Christ, according to His very existence in the Godhead, could not accomplish the reconciliation of the world to God.

The last three portions presented above relate to the general characteristic of the apostles' ministry. In the first, Paul likens the movement of the apostles to a triumphal procession that announces the victory of Christ over His enemies. The Saul of Tarsus who at one time so vehemently opposed Christ's move in His saints (Acts 9:1, 5) was now the apostle Paul who was being led by God Himself in his gospel missions throughout the Roman Empire. But God's leading of the apostles in triumph was "in the Christ." In manifest action the gospel move of the apostles was in and through the operation of Christ within them; hence, Christ was motivating them and moving in and through them for the spread of the triumphal gospel procession, and, most importantly here, God was operating in Christ for His operation in the apostles. Again, Christ incorporates God's operation, and the apostles incorporate Christ's operation. Finally, in an extension of the metaphor, the apostles are set in this triumphal procession not as mere captives but as incense bearers, filling the air with and giving off the sweet odor of Christ's triumph. Following the construction of this marvelous sentence, we again see the operation of God incorporated into the activities of the apostles: God operated (in Christ, though this is not expressed explicitly) in and through the apostles' actions to manifest the sweet savor of the knowledge of Christ in every place they traveled.

**I**n 2 Corinthians 2:17 Paul speaks of the apostles' ministry as being a work "as out of sincerity" and "as out of God," and what gives their ministry this unique quality is the operation of God in Christ, which the apostles incorporate in their own action. When the apostles speak, they speak "out of God"; that is, their speaking is an operation of God; and it is God's speaking in their speaking that gives their ministry its great impact. But the apostles "speak in Christ," indicating that their speaking is also an operation of Christ. Hence, when the apostles speak in Christ, they effectively speak out of God, for Christ incorporates the operation of God to give the apostles' ministry its effectiveness and its genuine sincerity.

Finally, Paul declares that in his work as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, a laboring priest of the

gospel of God" (Rom. 15:16), he has his "boasting in Christ Jesus in the things pertaining to God" (v. 17). As we will see repeatedly in the Epistles, the apostles and the believers can freely boast of their life and service, not because of their own actions but because of the divine operations in their actions. Hence, the various portions that speak of boasting in Christ or in the Lord or in God are implicit references to the incorporation of the operations of Christ or the Lord or God in the living and work of the believers and the apostles. Here in Romans 15:17 Paul gives us an additional dimension to that incorporation, for his boast in Christ's operation is a boast "in the things pertaining to God." In so saying, Paul indicates that the Christ Jesus who operated in him and in whom he boasted incorporated the things of God, including God's distinct operation, in His own operation. Once again we see levels of incorporation in the work of the apostles, a divine-human phenomenon that gave the work of the apostles its great effect in God's economy.

### ***Incorporation of God in the Believers' Participation in God's Economy***

What Christ does in God's economy and what the apostles do through His operation in them for God's economy are for the believers' initiation and participation in God's economy. In this rather long section we want to examine Christ's operation in the believers



insofar as it incorporates the operation of God. As we saw in the previous section related to the apostles' work, we will find that in the believers' participation in God's economy there are also levels of incorporation, the manifest actions and experiences of the believers incorporating the operations of Christ, who Himself incorporates the operations of God. Although we will be examining the believers' participation in God's economy in this section, we should constantly bear in mind that we are focusing on Christ's incorporation of the Father God in their participation, not on their participation per se. Further, in this section discussion concerning the Spirit's operation will be awkwardly missing, even though in all reality His operation occurs in every aspect of the believers' participation in God's economy. The basic operating principle of the Triune God—His *modus operandi*, so to speak—is that in every action of God the three persons of the Godhead operate distinctly. Hence, indeed the Spirit is in operation in all the points we will examine below (and those we have examined above), but in this section we are focusing on Christ's incorporation of the Father in the believers' participation in God's economy. In a later article we will explore the

Spirit's distinct incorporation of God and Christ in the economy of God as a whole. That being said, let us consider the incorporate operations of Christ in the believers' participation in God's economy as seen in Acts and the Epistles.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)*

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians begins with an extended praise of God in His triune operation: first, that of the Father (vv. 3-6); then, that of the Son (vv. 7-12); and finally, that of the Spirit (vv. 13-14). The first verse in this praise (v. 3) is a sort of "banner" that characterizes all of God's operation for His economy. (I have also used this verse as the banner for this article on Christ's incorporation of God.) How tremendous and multifarious are the many blessings that we as believers have received from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! But we should notice that these "spiritual" blessings (denoting the Spirit's operation) are given "in Christ," and in this we see that God operates in and through Christ in

**In the believers' participation in God's economy there are levels of incorporation, the manifest actions and experiences of the believers incorporating the operations of Christ, who Himself incorporates the operations of God.**

the many blessings that constitute the full compass of His economy for the believers. We can probably take Paul's word here as a general characterization of all of God's operation in His economy with the believers. All His operations are in Christ and through the Spirit ("spiritual"). Thus, the overarching principle in God's economy with the believers is that Christ incorporates the operations of God and applies these operations to the believers through the Spirit.

*Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (vv. 4-5)*

*I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward. (Phil. 3:14)*

Among the first operations in God's economy are His selection and predestination of the believers, which result in God's calling. In Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul makes clear that the choosing and the predestinating of the

believers are operations of God the Father (v. 3), but these operations are in and through Christ. We cannot fully fathom these preternatural operations, but by revelation Paul realized that the Father chose and predestinated the believers in Christ as “the virtue, the instrument, and the sphere” (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:3, note 9) of His operations. Again, Christ incorporates the operations of God, here in their very initiation of God’s economy with the believers. Further, that for which the believers are chosen and predestined is that which constitutes God’s calling. God’s calling is a strong notion in the Epistles (4:1, 4; Rom. 8:28; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24; etc.), and in Philippians 3:14 Paul tells us that this calling is an operation of “God in Christ Jesus.” God has foreordained a great prize for His believers (the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord—vv. 7-11), and He calls each and every one of us toward the goal of obtaining that prize. But His calling comes to us not as His direct operation but as the incorporate operation of Christ Jesus.

*Whom God set forth as a propitiation place through faith in His blood. (Rom. 3:25)*

*The church of God, which He obtained through His own blood. (Acts 20:28)*

*Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30)*

*Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)*

**T**he death of Christ fulfills all the righteous requirements of God upon humankind and provides propitiation for those who participate in God’s redemption through faith. We saw in an earlier section that while the sacrifice on the cross was distinctly Christ’s sacrifice, it was also an operation of God. In Romans 3:25 Paul refers to the redemptive actions of Christ as the believers’ reality of the function of the expiation cover on the Ark of the Testimony as the meeting place between God and Israel (Exo. 25:16-22; Lev. 16:12-16; Heb. 9:4-5). But in referring to Christ’s actions in this way, Paul says that God set Him forth for such; thus, in His death on the cross for our redemption and for God’s propitiation, God was in operation within Him. The death of Christ also purchased the church for God (Rev. 14:3; 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), and even though it was distinctly Christ who died to obtain the church for God, Paul told the elders from Ephesus that it was God who purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28), again indicating that Christ’s actions incorporated the operation of God.

In applying God’s economy to us the believers, Christ becomes righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us, and this happens mystically through our being incorporated into Christ. But our being “in Christ Jesus” is through an operation of God (“of Him”) (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, while it is Christ who becomes the mystical sphere of our existence before God, so that in Him we may be in a state of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption with God, it is through God’s operation in Christ that we enjoy Him as our qualified sphere. Paul speaks of this matter again in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says that the believers “become the righteousness of God in Him” (5:21). No doubt the thought here depends on his earlier statement in 1 Corinthians 1:30, that Christ becomes righteousness to us. But here in the second Epistle the righteousness of God is ascribed to us the believers, and in order for this to be possible, we the believers must be incorporated into Christ (which we will examine in a later article), and Christ must incorporate God as righteousness.

*This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31)*

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ also forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)*

**I**n exalting Christ to His right hand and making Him Leader and Savior, God was operating “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” As we saw earlier, the exaltation of Christ to God’s right hand incorporated God’s operation and enabled Christ to henceforth incorporate in His lordship God’s continual operation. In Acts 5:31 we see that in particularly giving repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel, God operated in Christ to make Him Leader and Savior. Thus, Jesus Christ is manifestly Israel’s Savior, who can lead them into repentance and apply the forgiveness of sins to them, but He does so by incorporating God’s operation “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Likewise, Paul tells the Ephesians that they too have been forgiven of their sins, and this through the operation of “God in Christ” (4:32). Forgiveness of sins, something all humankind needs from God, is something that God manifests in Christ, who by incorporation applies this operation of God to those who accept it by faith.

*All things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)*

*Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having*

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*made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens. (Col. 1:20)*

*And not only so, but also boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:11)*

**I**n the previous section we saw Christ's incorporation of God's operation in the apostles' ministry of reconciliation. Here we should briefly note that the same operation is, of course, related to the believers' experience of and participation in God's economy. God "has reconciled us to Himself through Christ," and "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them." In Colossians 1:20 Paul again mentions that God reconciled all things to Himself through the dying action of Christ, who has made peace through the blood of His cross. According to Paul, as Christ underwent the death of the cross, He incorporated the operation of God to reconcile all things to Himself. Based on Christ's reconciling work, the believers now may boast, not in anything that they have accomplished or attained but in what God has done through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:11). Through Christ's action the believers have now received the reconciliation to God, and having been reconciled by His death, they can now enter into and enjoy a much greater degree of God's salvific operation through the resurrection of Christ and the life that He Himself possesses in resurrection (5:10, 17-18, 21; 6:4; 8:2, 6, 10; John 10:10).

*The Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:5-6)*

*In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise. (Eph. 1:13)*

*In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will. (v. 11)*

In entering into the many rich experiences of the Christian life, the believers enjoy the Holy Spirit, who has been poured out upon them richly, and this impartation of the Holy Spirit is God's operation through Jesus Christ the Savior (Titus 3:5-6). Here we see the full operation of the Divine Trinity in the particular experiences of the

Holy Spirit by the believers: Christ Jesus incorporates God's operation to impart the Holy Spirit to the believers for their rich enjoyment of and participation in God and His economy. One facet of the believers' experience of the Holy Spirit is their being sealed "with the Holy Spirit of the promise" (Eph. 1:13). By believing in Christ, the believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit and thereby marked by God as His possession, and this operation by God is in Christ ("in whom" as the beginning of v. 13). Christ incorporates the operation of God to seal the believers as His possession with the Holy Spirit. Again, the distinct operations of all three of the Divine Trinity are expressed here by Paul. A few verses earlier Paul also mentions that the believers "were designated as an inheritance," again, in Christ ("in whom"—v. 11). Here I understand that Paul is using this Greek verb to refer to the operation of God to designate the New Testament believers as His new inheritance, transferring the designation from the Old Testament Jews only (Deut. 4:20; 9:29; 32:9; Psa. 28:9; Jer. 10:16); and this operation was done in Christ.

*Nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to*



**By believing in Christ, the believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked by God as His possession, and this operation by God is in Christ. Christ incorporates the operation of God to seal the believers as His possession with the Holy Spirit.**

*separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:39)*

**T**he believers enjoy a special relationship with God, above that which all other creatures and human beings participate in, and this special relationship is secured by the eternal and boundless love of God. Some few verses earlier Paul refers to the security we have in the love of Christ (v. 35), but here he expands the notion and refers to that love as "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." From this we should understand that the love of Christ is the love of God, which is in Christ, and that the exact way that God exercises His special love for the believers is through His operation in Christ. Christ so incorporates God in this matter that God's love through Him can be said to be the love of Christ Himself.

*As many promises of God as there are, in Him is the Yes; therefore also through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us to God. (2 Cor. 1:20)*

The believers also enjoy the many promises of God, who is faithful in every way to them (v. 18; 1 Cor. 1:9). But

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His faithfulness to His promises for the believers is through His operation in the Son of God, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:19). "In Him is the Yes"; thus, by incorporation Christ makes God's operation to be faithful in His promises effective for the believers. Further, as we will see in a later article, the believers render their Amen to God in response to these promises through Christ's operation within them, and in so doing, Christ glorifies God through us, an instance of our incorporation into Him.

*Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5-6)*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Pet. 1:3)*

*This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. (1 John 5:11)*

*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)*

In regenerating the believers and giving them the eternal life, God operated fully in Christ, and the writers of the Epistles indicate this in a number of places. Paul says that God made the believers alive together with Christ and raised them up and seated them in the heavenlies with Him (Eph. 2:5-6). Contrary to what they know by sight, by faith the believers should grasp the reality that they have been made alive, raised, and seated in the heavenlies through God's operation in Christ. Here there is a double aspect of Christ's incorporation; on the one hand, Christ incorporates the believers in Himself, and on the other hand, God operated to make Him alive and raise and seat Him in the heavenlies. Thus, the making alive, raising, and seating of the believers are directly the operation of God in these verses, but that operation is incorporated into Christ's own experience of the same. Peter likewise refers to the regeneration of the believers as an operation of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ that occurred through His raising Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). While it may be possible to understand here that the believers are regenerated based upon faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, probably something deeper is being referred to here, analogous to Paul's mystical understanding of the believers' resurrection in Ephesians 2:5-6. Christ rose from the dead through His incorporation of the operation of God to raise Him, as we saw in an earlier section of this article. But Christ also incorporates the believers into Himself mystically, and His experience of resurrection becomes the mystical reality of their resurrection

spiritually, which is, in point of fact, their regeneration. Thus, God can be said to regenerate the believers through His operation to raise Christ from the dead, and again, we see Christ's incorporation of God's operation in the believers' regeneration.

John speaks more generally of the giving of the eternal life to the believers as an operation of God in Christ (1 John 5:11). The giving of eternal life is something that God does, but the eternal life that is given is in His Son; thus, the Son incorporates the operation of God to give the eternal life to the believers. Paul says much the same in Romans 6:23. That which is graciously given (Gk. *charisma*) by God is the eternal life that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. Again, God's operation is incorporated in Christ, who becomes the manifest channel for the giving of eternal life to the believers.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)*

*To the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:6)*

*Through whom we have received grace and apostleship unto the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name. (Rom. 1:5)*

*I thank my God always concerning you based upon the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus. (1 Cor. 1:4)*

*That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:7)*

Along with the enjoyment of the divine, eternal life, the believers also receive the abundance of grace (Rom. 5:17), and this grace comes to them as well through Christ's incorporation of the operation of God. We have seen above that the love of Christ is the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus the Lord (8:35, 39), and that Christ incorporates God's loving operation as His own. Here in 2 Corinthians 13:14 we are probably looking at the same action of God but in its full triadic operation. What the believers experience as the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing other than Christ's incorporation of the love of God in His own actions; further, that incorporate action becomes experiential to the believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit to make participation in the grace of Christ as the love of God possible and real. Hence, we should not understand these three phrases as three separate divine attributes, which the believers can experience apart from one another. Rather, they are the believers' experience of the one loving,

gracious, and communicable God through the distinct operations of the three of the Godhead. Most marvelously, Paul here indicates that the practical secret of the Triune God is that He can be enjoyed by His believers through His own triadic operation within them. If ever one is tempted to relegate the Trinity to a concern of theology alone, here is strong impetus to seek something experiential in the consideration and appreciation of God. Even in the believers' most intimate experience of God, Christ, and the Spirit, the operations of the Triune God are fully at work. But we must also finally note in this context that the closing of 2 Corinthians is akin to the closing of most of Paul's other Epistles, whereby he commits the believers to the grace of Christ in more succinct language (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thes. 5:28; 2 Thes. 3:18; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25). Here his heart and utterance overflow, and thankfully because of it, we come to know in a deeper way that the grace of Christ can be with the believers through the operation of the entire Triune God. Nevertheless, as his custom is, it is essentially to the grace of Christ that Paul commits the Corinthians, even if he does so in this marvelous expanded form, and in mentioning the grace of Christ first, he seems to give Christ's operation prominence in the believers' experience. All this is to say that the ordering of these three phrases is significant and belies the nuance that it is Christ whom the believers experience, even if that experience has its source in God and is through the Holy Spirit.



**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing other than Christ's incorporation of the love of God in His own actions; further, that incorporate action becomes experiential to the believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit to make participation in the grace of Christ as the love of God possible and real.**

Elsewhere in his Epistles Paul indicates that the grace that the believers enjoy is given to them through an operation of God in Christ. God the Father has freely given grace to the believers in the Beloved Son (Eph. 1:6). Here again is the double incorporation we see so frequently in the Epistles: Christ incorporates the believers in Himself, and He incorporates the Father in Himself; hence, the operations of the Father can be applied to the believers in their experience in Christ. Christ incorporates the operation of God the Father to give grace to the believers freely, to grace the believers. In Romans 1:5 and 1 Corinthians 1:4 Paul mentions this same matter in opening the particular contents of each of these letters to his recipients. What he is as an apostle and what his recipients are as believers depend entirely on the grace that God has given him and them through God's operation in Christ Jesus. What is interesting here is not so much the fact that both writer and reader must stand and continue in grace for the successful effect that this Epistle was to have but that even in such preliminary comments Paul

does not fail to note, almost casually, that the giving and receiving of that necessary grace is accomplished through the operation of God in the incorporating Christ. It seems that the operation of God in Christ was a vivid reality to Paul, which he could not fail to mention, even in passing.

The last verse in the group above again refers to God's giving of grace to the believers in Christ, but here the operation is implicit. In saying that it is "His grace" (referring to God in Eph. 2:4), Paul implies God's operation. But "His grace" is "in Christ Jesus"; thus, we see that Christ incorporates God in His giving and being grace to the believers. I have taken "in Christ Jesus" as connecting to "His grace," yet there may be other ways to understand the exact connection. But however it is taken, Christ's incorporation of God's operation still obtains, even if the focus on the exact operation of God changes from giving grace to displaying the riches or to showing kindness to the believers.

*My God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:19)*

*The God of peace...perfect you in every good work for the doing of His will, doing in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)*

In caring for the believers, God operates in Christ Jesus to fill their every need according to His riches. The fact that Paul speaks of this filling as an operation done in Christ and according to God's riches in glory indicates that it is a filling that is primarily spiritual in nature. The Philippians had contributed to Paul's physical needs (Phil. 4:14-18), and here Paul assures them that in return God would fill their every need, but that recompense would be in Christ and according to God's riches in glory; thus, we should understand that the assurance here is that God will fill the inward need of the believers, which outward needs only lay bare. It is certainly implicit that the outward needs will be met as well. But the real need is inward, and every need will be filled through Christ's incorporation of God's operation to meet the needs according to His spiritual riches in glory.

In ending the Epistle to the Jewish believers, the writer

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of Hebrews expresses the hope that God will perfect the believers for the doing of His will, and the writer's understanding of how that perfecting work is accomplished is quite deep. God will perfect the believers by doing in them what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ. Hence, God Himself will operate in the believers to enable them to live out the accomplishment of His will. This is analogous to Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to work out their salvation based on the operation of God within them for the willing and the working for His good pleasure (2:12-13). However, here the writer of Hebrews points out that that operation of God within the believers is His operation through Jesus Christ; thus, it is by virtue of Christ's indwelling the believers that God can do in them what is pleasing in His sight for the doing of His will. Witness Lee comments:

From beginning to end [Hebrews] presents to us a heavenly Christ. Only here, with the word "God...doing in us...through Jesus Christ," does this book imply the indwelling of Christ. It is through the indwelling Christ that God works in us so that we can do His will. (Recovery Version, Heb. 13:21, note 1)

*We are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)*

A major aspect of the believers' participation in God's economy is that corporately they are the church as the Body of Christ. The church is not merely a collection of believers but an organic entity that results from God's operation in Christ. In fact, according to Paul, the church is the masterwork of God, which He created in Christ. This He did by regenerating the believers to make them a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, in bringing the church into existence, that is, in forming the believers into a corporate reality, Christ incorporated the operation of God, who is the Creator of this new creation. Some few verses later, in Ephesians 2:15, Paul says directly that Christ created the church as the new man in Himself. What Christ did to create the new man was at the same time God's operation in Him to create the masterwork of God.

*Receive one another, as Christ also received you to the glory of God. (Rom. 15:7)*

*Now the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus. (v. 5)*

In the church as the Body of Christ, the believers should receive one another according to the way that Christ received them to the glory of God, and how Christ

received them was in the way of incorporating God's operation to receive the believers. Earlier in his Epistle to the Romans, Paul points out that God has received the believers (14:3), and here he says that Christ has also received them. Hence, it appears that Christ incorporates the operation of God to receive the believers, and this is probably the reason why Paul says that Christ received the believers "to the glory of God." In receiving the believers as He does, Christ glorifies God because in His action God operates to receive the believers. The believers should likewise receive one another, and if we can be allowed to give the word *as* its full possible strength, we should understand Paul to be saying that the believers should receive one another by incorporating, in their own actions, the operation of God in Christ to receive the believers. We may be stretching the text here but certainly not beyond what happens in reality in the believers' actual experience in the church.

Finally, and perhaps as a fitting close to this rather long section on Christ's incorporation of God in the believers' participation in God's economy, we should consider Paul's hope for the Romans, stated near the end of his Epistle to them, that the God of endurance and encouragement would grant the believers to be of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus (15:5). Paul's concept here is not superficial, for it involves God's operation to affect the mind and thinking of the believers with regard to one another and to bring their thinking in line with Christ Jesus Himself. For this to happen, God as endurance and encouragement must operate within the believers to cause them to have the same mind that Christ Jesus has in relation to all the believers. Here we see quite a blended operation of God in Christ in the believers as their very thinking about one another, a thinking that is full of patient endurance for one another and hopeful encouragement with one another that God in Christ has for all His believers.

### Christ's Incorporation of the Spirit

When we carefully examine Christ's function in God's economy after His resurrection, as it is portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, we find repeatedly that He incorporates the operation of God the Father in His own activities. This has been the point of the foregoing, major portion of this article. However, in reading Acts and the Epistles, one finds some few instances where Christ is seen to be incorporating the operation of the Holy Spirit, and we should take note of these here. It is interesting to note that typically these instances occur in "flashbacks" to Christ's earthly ministry, and this is what we should expect. During His earthly ministry, Christ was manifestly God the Son in action, but as I hope I have shown in my two articles on the Gospel of John ("Johannine [1]"; "Johannine [2]"), His actions

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always incorporated the operations of God the Father and God the Spirit. While it is usually the operations of the Father that Christ is seen to explicitly incorporate in the Gospels (when there is explicit indication of incorporation), there are notable instances where He incorporates the operation of the Spirit as well. A good example of this can be found in Matthew 12:28: "If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Here the Lord Jesus speaks of His action to cast out demons, but He makes it clear that He does this by the Spirit of God. Hence, in His manifest action He incorporates the Spirit's operation, and this brings in the kingdom, not of Himself but of God. In Acts and the Epistles we rarely see Christ incorporating the operations of the Spirit per se, but there are a few instances, and we should examine these as part of our consideration of Christ's incorporate activities.

*Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)*

*Confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)*

*How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:14)*

*Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, on the one hand being put to death in the flesh, but on the other, made alive in the Spirit; in which also He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. (1 Pet. 3:18-19)*

*Until the day on which He was taken up, after He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose. (Acts 1:2)*

*Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (2:38)*

*When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of*

*the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (19:5-6)*

**I**n his gospel message to the Gentile household of Cornelius, Peter testified to Christ's earthly ministry, and in an earlier section of this article we saw that, according to Peter, Jesus incorporated the operations of God in "doing good and healing" (10:38). In his testimony Peter also indicated that Jesus incorporated the operations of the Holy Spirit, for part of God's operation in Him was to anoint Him with the Holy Spirit. As He went about doing good and healing, Jesus acted by the Spirit's operation within Him as His power. Paul says something similar, but in more general terms, in 1 Timothy 3:16. Christ was manifested in the flesh and justified in the Spirit. While it is difficult to know precisely what Paul is alluding to in this ancient hymn, one likely interpretation is that all of Christ's incarnate existence, both before *and* after His death and resurrection, viewed as a single phenomenon, bears the justifying testimony and vindication of the Spirit that Christ is indeed the revelation of God in humanity. Thus, Christ in His human existence incorporates the



**God as endurance and encouragement must operate within the believers to cause them to have the same mind that Christ Jesus has in relation to all the believers. Here we see a blended operation of God in Christ in the believers as their very thinking about one another.**

Spirit's operation to vindicate Him as God's incarnation before all (1 John 5:6-8).

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Christ's death on the cross as an action that incorporated the operation of the Spirit. Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit (9:14), and because of the eternal Spirit's operation in Christ's dying action, Christ's death bears a timeless quality that renders it effective to all who believe in His sacrifice for their sins, including the Old Testament saints who, by faith, offered sacrifices to God and had their consciences purged from sin (Rom. 3:25-31). As we saw in an earlier section of this article, Christ's death on the cross was not a separate operation of the Son of God but an incorporate action by the Son through the operation of the Father and, as we see now, through the operation of the eternal Spirit.

Peter also comments on the Spirit's operation in the death of Christ, but from a different perspective. Peter understood that while Christ was being put to death in the flesh, He was, at the same time, being made alive in the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18). There has been considerable dispute among

commentators about the meaning of the phrase *in the Spirit* here, but if we understand this as a reference to the Spirit of God at all, as it seems we should, then we have here an instance of the Spirit operating in Christ's death. In the next verse Peter continues to comment on the Spirit's operation in Christ during the few days between His death and His resurrection. In the Spirit who had been making Him alive during His death, Christ subsequently went to the spirits in prison and proclaimed His victory. This is not unlike the entire character of His ministry on the earth, when He went about proclaiming the gospel by the Spirit's anointing and operation within Him, according to Peter's testimony in Acts 10:38.

When Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He gave them direction concerning the carrying out of God's economy (Matt. 28:9-10, 16-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:17-30; 21:1-22; Acts 1:4-8; 10:42). Luke tells us that in directing the disciples, Christ gave commandment through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2), and here again we see Christ incorporating the operation of the Spirit in His visible actions in resurrection.

The last two portions above, the last that we will examine in this article, are particularly difficult to categorize in this study of Christ's incorporation of the operations of the Divine Trinity. Both refer to being baptized in ("upon," "into") the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to receiving the Holy Spirit as a result. The simple explanation for this is that faith in Christ, if viewed as a distinct action of the believer that is physically evidenced by baptism, elicits God's pouring out of the Holy Spirit as, perhaps, a sign of God's great pleasure in the new believer's faith and action. But there may be more going on here, because elsewhere we understand that baptism is not merely a token of belief but, more deeply, evidence of being brought into an organic union with Christ, His death, the entire Triune God, and the Body of Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:13). Hence, being baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, far from being an empty ritual, is the manifest testimony of the reality of being incorporated into Christ and His Body for a new believer's proper Christian and church life. With this understanding of baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in view, these two portions in Acts would seem to suggest that the Holy Spirit comes to the new believer through the action of the Lord Jesus Christ. In resurrection the Lord Jesus incorporates the Holy Spirit in Himself, and when a new believer appropriates Christ through faith, Christ for His part gives the Spirit to the new believer for his or her new living in Him (cf. John 3:34). Of course, we need not limit the giving of the Spirit to the action of Christ alone, for we have seen in a section above that Christ incorporates the operation of God in giving the Spirit to the believers (Titus 3:5-6; Eph. 1:11, 13).

## Conclusion

In the sections above I have attempted to isolate the manifest actions of Christ which incorporate the operations of God as they are related by the authors of Acts and the Epistles. Hopefully, this exercise has helped to make clear that today when Christ acts to work out God's economy, He does so by incorporating the operations of God in His own actions. I am also equally hopeful that this study will help to dispel some of the almost mythical misunderstanding of the Trinity that is so commonly held by Christians today. A careful reading of the New Testament helps us to discover that God is not three separate deities, who operate independently from one another, but one God in three persons who operate by way of incorporating each other's operation in their respective distinct actions. In simpler and more practical terms, when each of the Divine Trinity acts, all three operate, and all three are experientially present for the believers' enjoyment. Unlike the common notions held by many today, there are no representative operations of the Godhead, either by Christ for the Father or by the Spirit for Christ; rather, there are only incorporate operations, whereby one manifests the operation of the others. Christ is not separate from the Father and the Spirit but incorporates the operations of the Father and the Spirit in His own actions for God's economy. I hope that this article has given greater detail to this all-important principle of divine action. In the articles to come I hope to show in further detail, from Acts and the Epistles, the incorporate operations of the Divine Trinity in the Spirit's function in the church and in the living and work of the apostles and the believers. My great expectation is that with such a view of the incorporate operation of the Divine Trinity in the actions of God's economy in the New Testament we all may be motivated to live not according to mere human, Christian, and even godly principles but indeed by the same incorporation of the Triune God in our own living and work. **AF**

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