

# The New Testament Believers' Incorporation of the Triune God in Their Full Salvation

by Kerry S. Robichaux

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;  
for it is God who operates in you both the willing  
and the working for His good pleasure.*  
(Phil. 2:12-13)

For the past few years I have been very interested in what seems to be a pervasive phenomenon in the New Testament, what I, following Witness Lee (*Issue* 21-22, 24-26, 40-42), have characterized as incorporation. By the term *incorporation* I (and Witness Lee) wish to refer to the principle that when any one of the three of the Divine Trinity acts, all three operate. In other words, when any one of the three acts, He incorporates the operation of the other two in His action. What is manifest is the action of the one, but in that manifest action there is the incorporate operation of the other two. Thus, every distinct action of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit is an incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. Even in actions that have been traditionally associated with only one of the three (for example, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ), all three are in operation in the one manifest action of the one, the one incorporating the operations of all three. Certainly, the distinctions between the three are preserved, and thus, we should rightly understand, for example, that it was the Son of God who became flesh, died for our redemption, and rose from the dead. Yet at the same time we should recognize that in what are distinctly the Son's manifest actions, the Father and the Spirit operate by the Son's incorporation of them in His being and doing. The same is true of the actions of the Father and the Spirit.

The Gospel of John is especially rich in showing the incorporate operations of the Triune God in the manifest actions of Christ, and perhaps one example from it will help to more clearly illustrate the principle. In John 14:10 the Lord Jesus says,

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 a third 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 in the Godhead because there is a Father in the Godhead, and the Father is the Father in the Godhead because there is a Son in the Godhead. In terms of classical Latin theology this mutual interdependence of existence is called *coinherence*, or *circuminsession*. But also in this verse we explicitly see the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father: "I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." This aspect of the relationship between the Son and the Father has more technically been 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 persons of the Trinity. But also John 14:10 explicitly refers to the hidden mutual operation of the Father in the manifest action of the Son on the earth. When the Son spoke on the earth, He did so not only by virtue of His own agency but also through the operation of His heavenly Father, who abides in Him and does His work in Him. The Son's action of speaking, and the effectual benefit of His speaking, occurred because the Father operated ("does His works") in the Son. The 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 be noted that the mutual operation of the three in the Godhead manifests and depends on

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the other two aspects of incorporation—circumincession (coinherence) and circumincession (perichoresis). While this one verse shows the Son incorporating the operation of the Father, there are ample verses in the Gospels that show the Son incorporating the Spirit's operation as well (e.g., Matt. 4:1; 12:18, 28; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21) and others that show the Son incorporating both the Father's and the Spirit's operation (e.g., Matt. 3:16-17). In the two issues of the 2004 volume of this journal, I explored incorporation in the Gospel of John.

**I**n my last several articles on this phenomenon, I have tried to identify further instances of incorporation in Acts through Jude. In my first article in this series (April 2007), I focused on Christ's incorporation of the Father and of the Spirit. The mention of this incorporation is often seemingly casual, but there is, nevertheless, definite textual support for it. For example, in Ephesians 1:3 Paul writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." Paul begins an extended praise of God in His triune operation (first, that of the Father—1:3-6; then, that of the Son—vv. 7-12; and finally, that of the Spirit—vv. 13-14) with a sort of "banner" in verse 3, which characterizes all of God's operation in His economy. We should notice that these "spiritual" blessings (denoting the Spirit's operation, as we will see later) are given "in Christ," and in this we see that God operates in and through Christ in 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.

In the next two articles (October 2007 and April 2008), I turned my attention to the Spirit's incorporation of the Father and of the Son. As would be expected, the Spirit's actions are abundant in those New Testament books that detail God's economy after the resurrection of Christ. But interestingly, His actions, as recounted in these books, are frequently said to incorporate the operations of the Father and the Son. One example from the sixty or so instances of the Spirit's incorporation of the Father or of the Son in Acts through Jude is sufficient here. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prays that God the Father "would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." The strengthening is an operation of the Father, but His operation is in the work of the Spirit, to whom the power of God is normally ascribed (Micah 3:8; Luke 1:35; Acts 1:8; 10:38; 1 Cor. 2:4) and who indwells the believers and functions in their inner man. Paul

understood that while it is the Spirit who acts within the believers to empower them, His action is at the same time and in reality the Father's operation to strengthen them. In other words, the Spirit does not act independently and separately from the Father or even representatively of the Father, but the Father operates in the Spirit's action, and the Spirit can be said to incorporate the Father's divine operation. It is not that the Spirit is indistinct from the Father or that He has no distinct operation in this action. Indeed, empowering is distinctly His function. But in His distinct function and action, the Father is seen to be also in operation distinctly, no doubt as the source and intention of the strengthening of the believers. To the Father Paul's prayer is addressed; the Father is the One who originates the strengthening. But the Father operates in the action of the Spirit to empower the believers inwardly. It is interesting to further note that Paul prays for the Father's operation in the Spirit's work so that Christ would make His home in the believers' hearts (Eph. 3:17). There can hardly be a clearer example from Paul's writings of his understanding that God operates in His Trinity and that the persons of the Godhead incorporate each other's operations in their own. The Father gives strength through the Spirit's work in power within the inner being of the believers so that Christ may make His home in their hearts. In Paul's concept the Father's strengthening through the Spirit's empowering does not result merely in the moral fortitude of the believers; rather, it enables Christ the Son to operate in their hearts and find proper residence there. Thus, Christ's resultant operation to indwell the believers incorporates the operations of the Father and the Spirit.

**B**ut in my reading of Acts through Jude I did not limit myself to those instances of incorporation among the three of the Divine Trinity. In determining instances of incorporation in these books, what I was also looking for were textual indications that in the manifest experiences, actions, or functions of the New Testament believers, there are also the distinct operations of at least one of the divine persons, similar to what was seen in the Lord's declaration in John 14:10. I suspected that the writers of the New Testament also understood that the believers can and should incorporate the operations of the Triune God in their Christian and church life. But I was genuinely surprised at the magnitude of examples of this incorporation by the believers in Acts through Jude. According to my reading, which is admittedly imprecise and perhaps generous in what it admits, I find 85 instances of the incorporation of the Triune God by Christ, 61 by the Spirit, and 368 by the believers (all told, 514 instances). Even allowing for the imprecision and generosity of my reading, one must be impressed with the magnitude of instances by the believers. In a sense, it should come as no surprise that the New Testament frequently characterizes the actions of Christ

and of the Spirit as incorporating the operations of the other divine persons. If we properly understand that the three of the Trinity, though always distinct, are never separate in being and action, we should expect the writers of the New Testament to occasionally manifest this understanding, even if only casually, and as I have shown in my first three articles in this series, they do. What is significant in the greater number of instances involving the believers is that apparently the writers of the New Testament also understood that the believers should likewise thoroughly incorporate the operations of the Triune God in their own being and living. It is quite easy to read the New Testament and gather mere ethical standards of outward behavior for the believers. But when we pay close attention to the subtext of incorporation as it relates to the believers, we begin to understand that the believers should have more than mere moral behavior based on a highly ethical existence. Rather, the believers, as the New Testament writers describe them, should incorporate the operation of the Triune God in their life and service, and it is this incorporated operation that gives the believers their real worth in God's economy and among humankind.

But in considering the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in Acts through Jude, I noticed a complication in texture. A significant number of the instances do not seem to actually relate to the common believers. Some of these are particular to the experience of the apostles, and the number of these is not insignificant. Of the total 368 instances that relate to the believers generally, 115—almost a third—appear to relate to the unique experience of the apostles particularly. Thus, in my fourth and fifth articles in this series (October 2008 and April 2009), I attempted to show that the defining factor of the apostles' character and service is one of incorporation, whereby in their manifest activities for God's economy the divine persons of the Triune God operate. It is this incorporated operation of the Triune God that gives the apostles their real worth in God's economy and indeed defines their very existence and function as apostles.

What remains from my reading of Acts through Jude are the approximately 250 instances of incorporation by the common New Testament believers. Again, this amounts to about half of all the 514 instances that I could find, and the proportion suggests that the New Testament writers considered that the believers can and should enjoy a living that is not merely moral, ethical, and simply representative of God; rather, they should live and serve through the operation of the Triune God within them. Their living should incorporate His operation. In the

remaining articles in this series, I hope to explore how the New Testament writers viewed the believers' incorporation of God in their full salvation, corporate identity, organic functions, and various spiritual experiences.

When we examine John 14:10, as we have above, we see that the Son declares explicitly that in His manifest action of speaking the Father is operating ("does His works") and that the Father is operating in His speaking because He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Thus, the notion of incorporation is obviously the ideational focus of John 14:10; it is what the verse is about. But in most instances where the New Testament textually indicates the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God, the indication is what I am calling an underlayer, or subtext; that is, the ideational focus of the text in these instances is not usually the incorporation of the Triune God but some other matter, in line with the running narrative or exposition. Thus, instances of incorporation in the New Testament are primarily what we

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may call background information that usually relates to how the agents in the narrative or exposition do what they do. It is almost uncanny how often the writers in the New Testament characterize the actions of their text agents (which are often themselves personally or the believers generally) as incorporating the operations of the Triune God. It is safe to say that in many instances the matter of incorporation is indicated almost casually. But that does not detract from the importance of the notion. In fact, that it seems to be so pervasively mentioned, even in a casual way, indicates that the notion was strongly held by the New Testament writers even when it was not apparently important to the actual points that they were making. It is as if they felt compelled to qualify the actions they described as incorporate operations of the Triune God and not merely as independent manifest actions of their text agents. I hope that an examination of my previous articles will confirm this observation, and I believe that this article will further illustrate this.

As I have done previously, in this article I will adopt a catalog-and-commentary format in which I present groups of verses arranged by similar theme and, following each group, some comments that I hope will bring out the qualities of the incorporation of the Divine Trinity as

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it relates to the believers. In each group I will arrange the verses thematically and not necessarily in the order in which they appear in Acts and the Epistles. I will present the instances of the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in four very broad categories: in their full salvation in this article, and in their corporate identity, organic functions, and various spiritual experiences in the following articles. While I am confident that the instances that I will present are solidly instances of incorporation as I am defining the term here, I am much less confident about the broad categories that I am arranging them into. Since most of the instances are, as I have said above, casual and almost offhand, it may be futile to try to build them into a categorical edifice. Often these instances serve linguistically as background information on the text agents and not on the explicit ideational points being made in the text locally; thus, to pull these out and try to make a system out of them is precarious at best and foolhardy at worst. But one must adopt some system of arrangement when presenting this many isolated text snippets. Perhaps I would do better to just follow the arrangement of the New Testament books by chapter and verse, but that would obscure (or make difficult the observation of) similar instances across Acts through Jude. Further, even the rudimentary categories that I will adopt make the very valid point that Christian experience, as described in the New Testament, is pervasively an experience of incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. The same impression might be gained in some other arrangement of these instances, but the thoroughness of that experience of incorporation can be appreciated only by moving logically along some line of a description of Christian experience in general. What I *do not* want my reader to understand is that I am suggesting some sort of systematic theology of the New Testament believers' existence, living, and service based on their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. While that may be possible, I am not inclined toward the task in these articles. I am interested purely in noting how pervasive the believers' incorporation is in the New Testament and how much all that they are and do is described as being the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. The practical point that will hopefully arise is that as New Testament believers today we too should incorporate these operations in all that we are and do.

There is indeed a latent polemic in this. I believe that the standing concept among Christians today is that our lives are to be mainly moral, ethical, and simply representative of God. While this ideal is high enough for very many of us to fail, it seems to fall short of how the living of the believers is even casually described in the New Testament. There is indeed a high morality and noble ethic in the New Testament, and the believers do seem to represent God, according to the record. But upon closer examination—and this is the deeper point of

my study here—these moral, ethical, and representational aspects are secondary and really by-products of a more intrinsic phenomenon. To the writers of the New Testament, the believers exist, live, and serve because of their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in all that they are and do. Admittedly, this is a bold statement, but hopefully the evidence in these next few articles will convince my readers. Personally, I am quite convicted by the evidence and realize that so very often I do not live by the operation of the Triune God that is now so available to me within my spirit. All too frequently I live according to my personal disposition, preference, opinion, and concept. If anything, this study has awakened possibilities in my Christian and church life that I have never imagined before. I am beginning to realize how far more excellent it is to live and move by incorporating the operations of the Triune God than by living out my own peculiar and individual disposition. Perhaps this is what Paul was alluding to when he said,

According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:20-21)

That sums up my earnest expectation for my Christian life in general, and this study on the incorporation of the operation of the Triune God helps me to know how I can practically reach this hope and expectation. Certainly I hope that the same help will come to my readers through this study.

### **Incorporation in the Progression of the Believers' Full Salvation**

In the New Testament the believers' full salvation is presented as a progressing matter. In Romans 8:29-30 Paul offers a brief order to God's work in His salvation, and the internal logic of numerous statements in the New Testament indicate that the believers experience God's salvation according to an order that has been defined by theologians as either temporal, causal, logical, or some combination of these. Without wading into the immense controversy that surrounds the *ordo salutis*, I would like to employ a rough (and perhaps experiential) notion of the order in salvation so that I may organize those New Testament portions that relate the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in their experience of God's full salvation. Hopefully my readers will tolerate the stating of these instances of incorporation more than the ordering that I give them.

### **In Receiving the Gospel**

From the point of view of the believers, the first experience

of God's full salvation that incorporates the operation of God is their receiving of and believing in the gospel. There is certainly an experience that precedes this, which is the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit prior to one's belief, whereby the sinner is convicted inwardly and led to repentance and faith (1 Pet. 1:2; John 16:8), but the New Testament does not characterize this initial sanctification of the Holy Spirit as an incorporate operation of God. The New Testament, however, indicates that when sinners hear the gospel and thereby believe in Christ, an incorporate operation of God occurs.

And because of this we also thank God unceasingly that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but even as it truly is, the word of God, which also operates in you who believe. (1 Thes. 2:13)

Who through Him believe into God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Pet. 1:21)

He who believes into the Son of God has the testimony [of the Spirit in vv. 7-9] in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son. (1 John 5:10)

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit. (1 Thes. 1:5-6)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul unveils to the Thessalonians something quite deep about the word that the apostles preached. The word of their gospel was, by his own admission, not the word of mere men but in reality the word of God. While some may see in this merely a statement about the ideational content of the gospel (divine truth as opposed to human invention), the fact that Paul goes on to say that this word "operates" (*energô*) in those who believe indicates that he is not referring to mere ideas here but to actual divine activity, as he generally does whenever he uses this Greek word. What was working in the Thessalonians through the word of the apostles was God Himself as Word. Thus, when the apostles preached, God was operating to make their word His word, and the Thessalonians accepted it as such. What the Thessalonians "heard" was the word of the apostles, but what they "accepted" was the word of God, and Paul thanked God that they perceived what the reality of his ministry was,

that God was operating in his preaching. From the perspective of the believers' experience of salvation, God was also operating in the Thessalonians themselves as the Word, making the preaching of the apostles the seed of their faith. Thus, when they accepted the word from the apostles, they incorporated the operation of God as the source of their belief in what was being presented to them.

Peter tells the recipients of his first letter that the Christ who was foreknown before the foundation of the world and with whose precious blood they were redeemed is the One through whom they have believed into God (1:19-21). *Through Him* in verse 21 is not to be taken to mean only, as Alford points out, "through His manifestation" but rather "through Him personally...as the medium of your faith in God" (4:342). This suggests the divine operation of Christ within the believers who incorporate that operation when they believe. Thus, there is the hint here that Christian faith in God is not simply an

THE STANDING CONCEPT AMONG CHRISTIANS IS THAT OUR LIVES ARE TO BE MAINLY MORAL, ETHICAL, AND SIMPLY REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD. WHILE THIS IDEAL IS HIGH, IT SEEMS TO FALL SHORT OF THE DESCRIPTION PROVIDED BY THE WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT THE BELIEVERS EXIST, LIVE, AND SERVE BECAUSE OF THEIR INCORPORATION OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE TRINE GOD IN ALL THAT THEY ARE AND DO.

action of the believer; rather, it is an incorporation of the Christ's operation within the believer, resulting in faith. This is apparently the sense of the expression *the faith of Jesus Christ* and similar ones in Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 2:16, 20; 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9.

The apostle John also characterizes Christian faith as an incorporation of the divine operation, this time of the Spirit, in 1 John 5:10. John refers to this operation as "the testimony in himself," which from the context is the testimony that the Spirit gives. In verse 6 John has said that "the Spirit is He who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality." The Spirit, as the reality of what Christ is to the believers, makes Christ real to them by testifying within them (John 14:16-17; 15:26). Here in 1 John 5:10 John refers to this operation of the Spirit within the believers ("in himself") and ties it to their believing into God. The implication is that the believing is sustained by the testimony, and thus, the believing is an incorporation of the testimony, of the operation of the Spirit within the believer to make Christ a reality to him or her.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 Paul commends the Thessalonians for receiving the word of the gospel as they did.

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In an earlier article we saw that the preaching of the gospel by the apostles incorporated the operation of the Holy Spirit in power, but Paul goes on to say that in receiving the gospel of the apostles, the Thessalonians also incorporated the operation of the Holy Spirit, on their part, in joy. What was openly manifest among the Thessalonians was the joy that comes with salvation, that is, the relief, peace, and happiness that accompanies the conviction that one has been righteously reconciled to God and that one's sins are no longer accounted to him or her. This joy is actually the product of the Holy Spirit in operation within the believer (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17). Thus, Paul recognizes that the joy that the Thessalonians manifested was not merely their own psychological reaction to the gospel but was more intrinsically "of the Holy Spirit." In their being joyful in their newfound salvation, the Thessalonians, as do all believers, incorporated the operation of the Spirit.

### *In Being Constituted Righteous*

In the economy of God's full salvation, faith justifies human beings (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), and in some few places the justification which results is characterized as the incorporation of Christ's operation in one way or another.

For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous. (Rom. 5:19)

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)

Paul, in comparing what we have received in Christ with what we inherited in Adam (Rom. 5:12-21), points out that we who formerly were constituted sinners are now constituted righteous through the obedience of Christ (v. 19). The obedience of Christ and the constitution of the righteous are two separate operations, the former being the basis of the latter. The question is: how exactly does the latter operation occur? Many expositors understand this constituting as a forensic exercise by God, whereby, based on Christ's obedience in His human life and death, righteousness is imputed to the believers externally. But this destroys the verse's parallelism, which Paul is obviously stressing. In the first part of the verse we cannot understand that human beings are constituted sinners forensically by the imputation of sinfulness based on Adam's disobedience. Rather, something was passed on to all humankind through Adam's disobedience, which Paul later refers to as the sin that dwells in us (7:17), and this is what constitutes human beings sinners. Likewise, the believers are constituted righteous not simply by

imputation of righteousness but by something that has come into them through divine operation, which Paul variously refers to in these chapters as grace (5:15, 17, 20-21; 6:1), righteousness (5:17, 21; 8:10), life (5:10, 17-18, 21; 6:4, 10, 22-23; 8:2, 6, 10-11), the Spirit (vv. 2, 4-11), and Christ (v. 10). What makes the believers righteous is not simply a forensic pronouncement by God but more intrinsically the operation of Christ the righteous One in the Spirit within them to become their righteousness. They are constituted righteous by the reality of Righteousness Himself within them. Thus, they incorporate Christ as righteousness within themselves, and this constitutes them righteous.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul refers again to Christ as the incorporate basis for the believers' righteousness. Here, however, he is stronger in his pronouncement, saying that the believers become "the righteousness of God" and not merely righteous, as he says in Romans 5:19. They become the righteousness of God "in Him," that is, in Christ, and thus Christ is the actual factor of the believers being the righteousness of God. It is not in themselves that they are the righteousness of God, but rather in Christ. "In Him" here is a variant of Paul's frequent mystical phrase *in Christ*, which refers to the believers' union with Christ that results in their incorporation of His attributes and virtues for their Christian life. Because they are "in Him," what He is can now be ascribed to them, not simply by way of mere imputation but by actual union and communion with what He is. They incorporate in their own existence and living who He is and what He does, and based on this particular context, they incorporate Him as the righteousness of God (1 Cor. 1:30). Again, the believers are not the righteousness of God merely through some forensic imputation of external righteousness, but they are "in Him," who is righteousness, and by their organic union with Him they incorporate this excellent reality of what He is in order to be in reality the righteousness of God.

### *In Being Saved from Wrath and Condemnation*

Because the believers are justified before God, they are rescued from the wrath of God and enjoy the peace that comes with the release from condemnation. In Romans Paul ties these matters to the believers' incorporation of Christ within them.

Much more then, having now been justified in His blood, we will be saved through Him from the wrath. For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled. (Rom. 5:9-10)

There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

Therefore having been justified out of faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1)

In 5:9 Paul says that the believers “will be saved through Him from the wrath.” While the notion of incorporation is not strongly indicated here, we must wonder how the believers will be saved from the wrath “through Him.” Perhaps our first inclination would be to understand *through Him* to mean “on account of Him” or “based on His accomplishments,” but neither of these fits the sense of the Greek preposition here (*dia*), which normally has the meaning of “by means of.” It appears that Paul has some deliberate notion in mind here, which he did not feel to elaborate, but in the explanation of this sentence which he offers in the next (v. 10), he ties the saving in Christ’s life to the saving from wrath through Christ. This is not to say that he equates the two notions, but the salvation from wrath through Christ, he argues, is certain *a fortiori* because the believers “will be saved in His life.” The believers are to enjoy a deeper salvation (one not merely from wrath) through their experience of Him as the divine life that regenerates, transforms, and ultimately glorifies them, and this experience is one of incorporating Christ as life. Ultimately, salvation from wrath, as Paul presents it here, is tied not simply to Christ’s death for sinners (v. 8), though certainly that is the necessary and sufficient basis for it, but also to the deeper salvation in Christ’s life (v. 10), which the believers incorporate throughout their entire Christian life. Thus, Paul, in using the phrase *through Him* and in offering the following sentence as explanation, seems to point to a further and deeper reason for salvation from wrath, that is, one that involves not only the objective value of Christ’s death but also the believers’ subjective experience of Him as the divine life within them, the divine life that they incorporate for their Christian living.

After his lengthy consideration of God’s justification of the believers and its implications, Paul declares in Romans 8:1 that “there is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The condemnation here is probably not the objective “condemnation to all men” mentioned in 5:16 and 18 and implied in 1:18—3:20, as here the condemnation appears to be related to the affliction of conscience that Paul recounts in chapter 7 and is therefore subjective. The inward condemnation that Paul speaks of in chapter 7, from his own experience before believing in Christ, is poignant and palpable, and the relief from condemnation that he speaks of in 8:1 should be understood to be the believers’ subjective experience that results from

being justified by faith. It is not only the initial relief from condemnation, as the later verses make clear, but it certainly includes the initial experience that the believers have. Paul refers to the believers as “those who are in Christ Jesus,” pointing to their organic union with Christ, which he typically does with this mystical phrase. Thus, the believers’ subjective experience of relief from condemnation results from their being in Christ and derives from their union with Him. This relief from condemnation is a genuine experience that the believers have through their incorporation of Christ Jesus within them. On this point Witness Lee offers a similar observation on the general use of the phrase *in Christ* in this chapter:

In this chapter the phrase *in Christ* refers not only to our standing, our position, in Christ, as mentioned in ch. 6, but also to the reality of our daily walk in our regenerated spirit. Thus, this chapter speaks of being in Christ as a term or a condition. This corresponds with being saved in His life in 5:10. (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:1, note 3)

WHAT MAKES THE BELIEVERS RIGHTEOUS IS NOT SIMPLY A FORENSIC PRONOUNCEMENT BY GOD BUT MORE INTRINSICALLY THE OPERATION OF CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IN THE SPIRIT WITHIN THEM TO BECOME THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS. THUS, THEY INCORPORATE CHRIST AS RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHIN THEMSELVES, AND THIS CONSTITUTES THEM RIGHTEOUS.

In Romans 5:1 Paul speaks positively of the same experience of relief from condemnation, calling it here “peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace toward God is not merely an outward situation between us and God, nor is it simply a conciliating of God on His side. Paul says that “we have peace toward God,” and this should include our subjective feeling of tranquility, harmony, security, and lack of fear in relation to God that comes from being justified out of faith. This peace toward God is through Christ, and for this peace there is again probably more than a forensic basis. “Through our Lord Jesus Christ” cannot be reduced to mean simply “on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work.” Because this peace involves a subjective experience within the believers, Paul may be implying that it is drawn from their union with Christ and results from a divine operation within them that they incorporate.

### *In Dying with Christ and Living to God through Baptism*

Normally baptism accompanies one’s initial salvation (or should, according to the pattern of the New Testament), and though an outward action, baptism has a deeper reality to it, according to Paul’s presentation in Romans

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6:3-11. The spiritual reality of baptism has very much to do with the believers' incorporation of Christ. Here we should examine this portion as a whole rather than trying to separate out the individual instances of incorporation into various categories of the believers' experiences. For the most part this section of Romans presents the believers' incorporation of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and how it affects their Christian experience.

<sup>3</sup>Or are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup>We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is justified from sin. <sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, <sup>9</sup>knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more; death lords it over Him no more. <sup>10</sup>For the death which He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life which He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:3-11)

Paul first points out the basic reality of baptism, as presented in Romans 6, that the baptism of the believers is in fact a baptism into Christ Jesus. This is a spiritual reality, not simply a metaphor for the state of the Christian life. Baptism, the outward action, is what it is because it visibly shows what is invisibly happening when one believes into Christ (as the Greek expression often is in the New Testament). Through faith, the believers are put into Christ, that is, incorporated into Him, and enter into a living that Paul frequently refers to as being "in Christ." In their new union with Him, and with Him as their new spiritual realm and source, they now derive all the realities of their intrinsic existence and living from Him. They live out the reality of what He is; they incorporate what He is in their own existence and living. The first and basic realities of Christ that they incorporate are His death, burial, and resurrection, as Paul makes clear. By being incorporated into Christ through the reality of baptism, the believers participate, in reality, in His death. This is not a participation in the redemptive function of His death, for only He, as uniquely God and man, can be the Redeemer (as Anselm of Canterbury so ably established centuries ago in his *Cur Homo Deus*). This is a participation in the terminating function of His death, whereby He served as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and brought to an end the natural life of fallen humankind, which Paul later calls the "old man" (Rom. 6:6). By this participation the believers are enabled to enter into and

experience the termination of the fallen natural life of human creation, that is, to incorporate this termination in their own living. Further, Paul says that through the reality of baptism, the believers are incorporated into the burial of Christ Jesus, and what results from His burial becomes their own experience. He was raised from the dead, and the believers incorporate this reality so as to walk in newness of life. The resurrection of Christ from the dead was a divine operation of the entire Triune God, which we have seen in an earlier article in this series, and Paul alludes to this divine operation here in saying that He was raised "through the glory of the Father." In operating to raise Christ from the dead, the Father expressed His own glory, and thus, Christ incorporated the Father's operation within Himself and manifested the Father's glory through His being resurrected. When the believers incorporate this reality in their own living, Paul says that they "walk in newness of life." This is perhaps the very best characterization of the intrinsic significance of the Christian life in the New Testament. The Christian life is not merely a moral, ethical, or representational walk; it is a walk that incorporates the newness of the divine and human life that the God-man Christ has brought forth through His resurrection from the dead. In verse 5 Paul backtracks a bit and recasts what he has just said in further terms which unveil more about the realities that he is talking about. Baptism, which he here terms "the likeness of His death," grafts the believers into Christ (cf. Rom. 11:24), and they are thus "grown together with Him" in His death. The result of this operation is that they similarly incorporate the divine operation in His resurrection and participate in the "likeness of His resurrection," which he has previously referred to as the newness of life. The likeness of His resurrection here is not specifically a reference to the future hope of resurrection that the believers hold, though certainly it includes the notion and ultimately consummates in it; rather, the likeness of His resurrection is the very present experience that the believers have of walking in newness of life through their incorporation of Christ not only as the resurrected One but also as the One who now lives in resurrection as His ongoing condition.

Attendant to this reality are a few deeper folds. First, Paul gives greater detail to what he has said about being baptized into Christ's death, that is, that "our old man has been crucified with Him." The old man is the fallen, natural life of humankind, and this, says Paul, has been crucified. Second, the termination of the old man has been accomplished "in order that the body of sin might be annulled." The sense of the body of sin being annulled here is that the body has had its function, insofar as it relates to sin, taken away and that it has been made useless for sin. Prior to Christ's crucifixion, the body's chief function was to be the instrument for the old man, primarily for sinning. Now that the old man has been

crucified, the agent has been taken out of the way, and the usurpation of the instrument has been annulled. The function of the body to serve as the physical instrument for sin has been undercut and rendered ineffective. Third, the believers, who live out these realities by incorporating them in their Christian life, “should no longer serve sin as slaves.” The old man, with its fallen nature, has been terminated in the crucifixion of Christ, and the body, as the instrument for sin in that fallen nature, has been unyoked from the old man and is no longer required to answer to his bidding; thus, the believers, incorporated into Christ in His death and resurrection and incorporating in themselves the operations in His death and resurrection, have been freed both on the natural level (the old man) and on the physical level (the body of sin) from the endless drudgery of sinning and need no longer submit to sin as his demeaned slave. In that Christ has died, they have died through His incorporation of them (v. 7), and in reality through their incorporation of Him they are justified, that is, “acquitted” (Alford 2:368), from the whole predicament of sin, which Witness Lee describes as “both the nature of sin with its power and its pain, and the sinful acts with their history and their judgment” (Recovery Version, Rom. 6:7, note 1).

In the last four verses of this portion Paul reflects summarily on Christ’s experience of death and resurrection and how it relates to the experience of the believers. Because the believers have been incorporated into Christ, they have died with Him, and Paul says that Christian faith holds that they “will also live with Him.” Similar to the future tense in verse 5 (“will also be in the likeness of His resurrection”), the future tense here does not denote simply the believers’ final enjoyment of eternal life. The whole context suggests that this life with Christ includes the believers’ living in the present time as well as in the future. But more importantly, the believers “live with Him” by incorporating Him in their living. Christ lives today in resurrection, and for the believers to live with Him in the same sense that He lives, they must participate in His living in resurrection; they must live out His resurrected living. Thus, they live through the operation within them of the Christ who lives in resurrection today; that is, they live with Him through their incorporation of Him. The thought here is similar to what the Lord Himself expresses in John 14:19: “Because I live, you also shall live.” Also, in Galatians 2:20 Paul in a short span repeats much the same notion, which we will examine below. What Paul says about Christ in the following verses (Rom. 6:9-10), he says to imply that the believers may also have the same experience. Christ dies no more, and because He incorporates them into Himself, the

believers die no more. Death lords it over Christ no more (as it attempted to do at the cross but ultimately to no avail—cf. Acts 2:24), and death lords it over the believers no more through incorporation. The death that Christ died, He died to sin once for all, and the life that He now lives, He lives to God, and the implication is that through incorporation, the believers have died to sin (comparable to “no longer serve sin as slaves” in v. 6) and now live to God (comparable to “walk in newness of life” in v. 4). The implication is made explicit in verse 11, where Paul exhorts the believers to “reckon” themselves as “dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus.” The reality of being dead to sin but living to God is to be found in Christ Jesus, that is, through the believers’ incorporation of the operations of Christ who died to sin and rose to live to God. Paul here exhorts the believers only to “reckon” with the fact of this reality, which is quite different from actually experiencing and living in it. This reckoning, a kind of spontaneous consideration and realization that comes by seeing and believing the

CHRIST LIVES TODAY IN RESURRECTION, AND FOR THE BELIEVERS TO LIVE WITH HIM IN THE SAME SENSE THAT HE LIVES, THEY MUST PARTICIPATE IN HIS LIVING IN RESURRECTION; THEY MUST LIVE OUT HIS RESURRECTED LIVING. THUS, THEY LIVE THROUGH THE OPERATION WITHIN THEM OF THE CHRIST WHO LIVES IN RESURRECTION TODAY; THAT IS, THEY LIVE WITH HIM THROUGH THEIR INCORPORATION OF HIM.

facts (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 6:11, note 1), is basic and necessary to the actual experience of the facts, but it does not equal the experience itself. Yet Paul is quite clear in stating the fact that the believers are dead to sin but living to God through incorporation.

While these realities are almost beyond our comprehension and too often beyond our actual experience, we should not fall short in our expectation that they can be experienced fully. Paul could not have easily contrived these points without having first experienced them himself, so deep and profound as they are. It would seem that Paul was living what he was writing or at least had tasted it in his personal experience. Certainly these experiences are beyond mere human experience. Who can naturally be dead to sin, let alone be living to God in the full sense of the phrase? Only by being in Christ Jesus and by living Christ Jesus out can anyone successfully be dead to sin but living to God, because only Christ Jesus has died to sin and lives to God. Paul apparently had seen this fact and reckoned that his own living could manifest it. As to actual experience, he comes to that in chapter 8, where he shows that the experience of being dead to sin but living to God occurs through the operation of the Spirit of life within the

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believers (vv. 1-13). Thus, as believers we should have every hope and the full expectation that we can experientially be dead to sin and living to God. We have, in reality, been put into Christ Jesus, and through the Spirit within us we can incorporate Christ's operations in our daily living, operations that first worked in Him to enable Him to die to sin once for all and to live to God henceforth.

Elsewhere in his Epistles Paul repeats this notion of dying in Christ and living to God in Him. In these instances we should note that the realities he describes are possible because the believers incorporate Christ in their living.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory. Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greediness, which is idolatry. (Col. 3:3-5)

If you died with Christ from the elements of the world. (Col. 2:20)

For if you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:13)

But they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts. (Gal. 5:24)

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. (Rom. 8:10)

So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God. (Rom. 7:4)

But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter. (Rom. 7:6)

I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20)

For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled. (Rom. 5:10)

For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:22)

Even when we were dead in offenses, [He] 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, that He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5-7)

In Colossians 3:3-5 Paul, without saying as much directly, refers to the believers' dying in Christ, but he continues more directly to say that their new life, their spiritual life, is "hidden with Christ in God." Their having died is, by implication here and by direct reference some few verses earlier in 2:20, through their being incorporated into Christ, and the life that they now live by is that which is incorporated in Christ in God. Paul points out in verse 4 that this life is Christ Himself; thus, what the believers have as their organic essence for their identity as Christians is Christ as life within them. Certainly Paul's point here is that that life, which is Christ, is hidden in God in the heavens, and therefore, the believers should no longer be attracted and attached to the things which are on the earth. But Paul is talking about their life, the inner spiritual essence that they live and grow by, and this is something that not only exists in the heavens with Christ in God but also within them. They incorporate this life in their Christian living on earth, and based on what Paul says, they have the potential to live not as though merely on the earth but as ones who, in reality, incorporate the Christ who is hidden in God in the heavens. One day this hidden reality will be openly manifested, when Christ openly appears in glory and when, at the same time, the believers will manifest Him as their inner life also in glory. Because the believers today and in reality have died in Christ and now have their spiritual life essence in Christ, Paul exhorts them to exercise this incorporation by putting to death their members that are on the earth, which, due to the fall and the corruption of sin, are identified with the varieties of sin.

The believers have died in Christ, and this serves as the basis for their putting to death the sinful facilities of their bodies. But the practical outworking of that putting to death occurs because they incorporate the operations of the Spirit as the effective means, as Paul indicates in Romans 8:13. The New Testament believers, unlike other human beings, have a choice for their living. Either they can live out the fallen flesh, as do all other human beings involuntarily, or they can live out the operation of the Spirit within them to mortify the sinful drives that utilize the body and to live to God. This is far beyond mere morality and ethics, even if it presents itself as a moral and ethical living. In such a living the divine operation of God the Spirit is deliberately incorporated by the believers. In Galatians 5:24 Paul says that the believers who "have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts" are "of Christ Jesus." The phrase *of Christ Jesus* on its own may not suggest incorporation, but as it relates to the

whole notion of the believers' crucifying the flesh and living to God, it has to be understood to refer not merely to the believers' adherence to Christ or to His loose association with them but also more deeply to that relationship which elsewhere Paul expresses as being "in Christ." To be "of Christ Jesus" is to be incorporated into Him and thereby to incorporate His operation in the Spirit to crucify the passions and lusts that motivate the fallen uses of the body. In Romans 8:10 Paul says directly that Christ is in the believers, and because of that, the spirit of the believers is life within them. This life, as in Colossians 3:3-4, is the inner spiritual essence that the believers live by, and Paul makes it clear that their human spirit is one with and identified with this life because Christ is in them. Thus, they incorporate Christ in their spirit, and this makes their spirit life. Because of sin, their body is dead, but because of Christ, their spirit is life. The life here is not a static virtue but an essence in operation within them, which allows them to walk according to the Spirit, fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (Rom. 8:4), and please God (cf. v. 8). The life that they live to do these things, they live by incorporating Christ within them.

Earlier in Romans Paul tells the believers that they "have been made dead [lit., put to death] to the law through the body of Christ" that they, now joined to Christ, "might bear fruit to God" (7:4). Again, he refers to the spiritual fact of the believers' dying with Christ, which he presented in detail in chapter 6, a fact that depends on Christ's incorporating the believers into His death. But this time he emphasizes that through this incorporate death the believers have been released from the law, to which they were previously bound and by which sin abounded through their bodies (7:7). Thus, in all, Paul presents Christ's incorporation of the believers into His death as effecting the crucifixion of the old man of the believers (6:6), the annulling of the believers' body of sin for use in committing sin (v. 6), the believers' being made dead to sin (vv. 11, 7) and free from its mastery (v. 9) and slavery (v. 6), and the believers' being made dead to the law (7:6), which enabled sin to abound. Through Christ's incorporation of the believers in His death on the cross, the full basis for the predicament of sin has been removed for the believers. But further than this, the believers are joined to Christ in His resurrection, and this enables them to enter into a positive living that glorifies God through their incorporation of Christ. In 7:4 Paul continues to say that the believers, because they have been made dead to the law, have been joined to Christ, who has been resurrected. While the word *joined* does not appear in the original Greek here—literally, the Greek reads, "unto your becoming to

another"—the notion of being joined is supported by the entire metaphor of the joining of man and woman (cf. Eph. 5:31; 1 Cor. 6:16-17); thus, what Paul is referring to is the believers' being joined to Christ and becoming one with Him. In this union, Paul says, the believers are able to "bear fruit to God" (Rom. 7:4), and we must understand this to mean that their bearing fruit to God depends on the union and draws from the union. The believers bear fruit to God by living out their organic union with the resurrected Christ, not by living independently from Him. They incorporate Christ in their living through their union with Him, and this incorporate living bears fruit to God.

It is interesting to note that Paul says that the believers bear fruit to God and not to Christ. Their living in the organic union with Christ ultimately glorifies God and not Christ, as we might logically expect. This is in keeping with the notions that the Son, by definition, is the glory of the Father (Heb. 1:5) and that the Son's actions

THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS, UNLIKE OTHER HUMAN BEINGS, HAVE A CHOICE FOR THEIR LIVING. EITHER THEY CAN LIVE OUT THE FALLEN FLESH OR THEY CAN LIVE OUT THE OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT WITHIN THEM TO MORTIFY THE SINFUL DRIVES THAT UTILIZE THE BODY AND TO LIVE TO GOD. THIS IS FAR BEYOND MERE MORALITY AND ETHICS, EVEN IF IT PRESENTS ITSELF AS A MORAL AND ETHICAL LIVING.

always glorify the Father (John 13:31; 14:13; 17:1). As we saw in an earlier article in this series, the Son glorifies the Father by incorporating the Father's operations within Him. Thus, the believers' bearing fruit to God incorporates not only their organic union with Christ but also Christ's incorporation of the Father's operation within Him to thereby glorify the Father. It is akin to what the Lord Himself says in John 15:8: "In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." Here the Lord is referring to the divine-human incorporation of Christ with His believers, which He illustrates with the metaphor of the vine. He is the vine, and the believers are the branches who bear the fruit, but it is the Father who is glorified by the fruit-bearing. The Father is the source of life for the vine and the branches, and His divine life is manifested in the Son's being the vine, in the believers' being joined to the Son as branches, and in the believers' bearing the fruit.

In Romans 7:6 Paul repeats his points about the believers' dying to the law (this time without implying their incorporation into Christ) and their living in newness of life. In repeating this latter point, however, he speaks of the believers' serving "in newness of spirit," and this implies their incorporation of the operation of the Spirit in their

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spirit. English translations of the Bible over the centuries have alternated between capitalizing *spirit* in this verse and not. This demonstrates the difficulty for interpreters in deciding whether Paul was referring exclusively to the Holy Spirit in the believers or inclusively to their human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It has had much to do, no doubt, with the position of the interpreters on the issue of the human being as bipartite (spirit-soul and body) or tripartite (spirit, soul, and body). The version quoted here obviously favors the latter interpretation, understanding that human beings are tripartite and that Paul was referring to the believers' human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But either interpretation indicates that the new service of the believers, who have died to the letter of the law, incorporates the operation of the Holy Spirit. The believers now serve God not by living out the efforts of their flesh to keep the letter of the law, which, elsewhere Paul says, can never please God (8:8), but by living out the operation of the Spirit (in their spirit), which fulfills the righteous requirement of the law (v. 4) and satisfies God.

**I**n Galatians 2:20 Paul provides excellent detail of his incorporation of Christ to live the Christian life, and this provides the pattern of such a living for all the believers. First, as we have seen elsewhere in his Epistles, the basis for the Christian life that Paul describes here is the reality of having died with Christ. This occurred through the believers being incorporated into Christ when He died on the cross. This historical and yet spiritual reality has a very present reflex in the life of the believers, as Paul goes on to say. Though crucified with Christ, the believers "now live," but they live through the "Christ who lives in" them. This is precisely what we have been calling incorporation, that is, the manifest action of one party (the believers living) by the hidden operation of the divine person(s) within them ("Christ who lives in" them). There is something deep in Paul's use of the pronoun *I* here. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live"; yet "I now live," and "I live in faith." On the one hand, Paul, as a typical believer, had been crucified with Christ; on the other hand, he lived by incorporating the Christ who lived within him and in faith. The implication is that the co-crucifixion of the believers does not annihilate them but terminates them in a spiritual sense and ushers them into the experience of resurrection for their new living of incorporating the Christ who lives in them. Witness Lee helps to discriminate these two senses of the "I":

*No longer I* does not indicate an exchanged life, a life in which Christ comes in and we go out, for later in this verse Paul said, "I live." As regenerated people, we have both the old "I," which has been crucified (Rom. 6:6), concerning which Paul said, "No longer I," and a new "I," concerning which Paul said, "I live." The old, terminated

"I" was without divinity; the new "I" has God as life added to it. The new "I" came into being when the old "I" was resurrected and God was added to it. On the one hand, Paul had been terminated, but on the other hand, a resurrected Paul, one who was regenerated with God as his life, still lived. Furthermore, although Paul said, "No longer I," he also said, "It is Christ who lives in me," for it was Christ who lived, but it was in Paul that He lived. The two, Christ and Paul, had one life and one living. (Recovery Version, Gal. 2:20, note 2)

Faith is the *modus operandi*, so to speak, for this incorporate living. It is not simply that the believers acknowledge the spiritual facts as Paul expresses them here, and thereby the facts become their experience. Rather, Paul very directly says first that Christ lives in him and then refines this notion by saying that the life that he now lives in the flesh he lives in faith. It is not that Paul reduces Christ's living in him to a mere cognitive act. Instead, he enlarges the notion of faith to be the substantiating of Christ's living in him. Thus, faith is the exercise of the organic union with Christ with its incorporate living of Christ within the believers, even while they are still in the physical realm and confines of the flesh. The last phrase with its modifier ("the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me") expands this notion of faith. The faith in which the believers live is "the faith of the Son of God." While some commentators understand this phrase to mean simply faith in the Son of God as the object, it is probably more accurate to understand that the faith has the Son of God as both its source and its object, that is, that the Son of God, who comes to live in the believers through their hearing of the gospel, provides the believing ability and the object of that ability. As we saw previously, in the verses related to believing the gospel, faith is not simply an endeavor on the part of the believers but more importantly a divine operation of Christ within them, which they incorporate when they believe. Paul is apparently referring to a similar notion here. The faith in which the believers live is the faith of the Son of God because the Son of God lives in them and they now incorporate His operation within them.

**I**n the foregoing paragraphs I have mentioned in passing Romans 5:10, but it is worthwhile to deliberately notice that this verse speaks in a general way of the believers' incorporating Christ for their full salvation. In the first part of the verse Paul points out that the believers have been "reconciled to God through the death of His Son," and this mainly refers to reconciliation based on the objective fact that Christ died for sinners (v. 8; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:3). Then Paul goes on to say that a greater aspect of God's full salvation ensues from reconciliation through His death, that is, that the believers "will be saved in His life." If God has done so much for

His enemies, that is, if He has reconciled them to Himself through the death of His Son (2 Cor. 5:19), He will certainly do much more for those who accept and participate in that reconciliation, and this greater aspect of His salvation will be carried out in the resurrected life of His Son, which follows from His death. The life of His Son is not something apart from His Son but is His Son Himself operating within the believers as the resurrected life. It is akin to the “Christ who lives in me” in Galatians 2:20, which we considered above. Thus, this greater aspect of God’s full salvation is, most generally, an incorporation of the operation of Christ as life in the believers’ experience.

First Corinthians 15:22 and Ephesians 2:5-7 refer to the fact of Christ’s incorporation of the believers in His resurrection. Just as He incorporated the believers in Himself when He died on the cross, and because of that, the believers are now able to incorporate the operation of His death to crucify their flesh experientially, so also He incorporated them in Himself when He rose from the dead, and because of that, they are now able to incorporate the operation of His resurrection to be made alive and to live to God experientially. In 1 Corinthians 15:22 being made alive in Christ, in its context, refers mainly to resurrection unto life at the Lord’s coming back (John 5:29; Luke 14:14; 1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 20:4, 6), but it should not be limited to just this reference. As we have seen repeatedly above, the believers are made alive (in their initial salvation, which is their regeneration) and continue to live by their incorporation of the operation of Christ as life within them; thus, the final resurrection unto life is the “fruit” of this incorporate living and comes forth from it. In Ephesians 2:5-6 being made alive and being raised up together with Christ are references to spiritual realities that obtain through the historical resurrection of Christ. But Paul does not mention these facts as idle, objective truths, for in the next verse he indicates that these facts have a bearing on God’s purpose to display “the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” While the display will be “in the ages to come,” the experience that the believers must have for this future display is in the present age. Today the believers incorporate “the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness...in Christ Jesus,” and this incorporate experience, as Paul presents it, is based on Christ’s incorporation of the believers in His being made alive and being raised up.

### *In Being Made the Sons of God*

Another aspect of God’s full salvation of the believers is

their being made the sons of God, and in two portions Paul speaks of this aspect in the way of incorporation.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father! The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom. 8:15-16)

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! (Gal. 4:6)

These verses show the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God on a number of levels. In an earlier article in this series I examined in detail the Spirit’s incorporation of God the Father and of Christ the Son in these two sets of verses. Here we are interested particularly in the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God. In Romans 8:15 Paul tells the believers that within them there is not a spirit of slavery to the works of the law, which results in

THE SERVICE OF THE BELIEVERS, WHO HAVE DIED TO THE LETTER OF THE LAW, INCORPORATES THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE BELIEVERS NOW SERVE GOD NOT BY LIVING OUT THE EFFORTS OF THEIR FLESH TO KEEP THE LETTER OF THE LAW, WHICH CAN NEVER PLEASE GOD, BUT BY LIVING OUT THE OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT IN THEIR SPIRIT, WHICH FULFILLS THE RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENT OF THE LAW AND SATISFIES GOD.

an experience of fear, but a spirit of sonship, which results in their confident cry to the Father as sons. This cry—“Abba, Father”—is the unique cry of Christ the Son to the Father (Mark 14:36), and the believers now participate in His cry by incorporating Him as the Son in their spirit. In Galatians 4:6 Paul says that it is the Spirit of His Son who cries, “Abba, Father,” within the hearts of the believers. Thus, when we put the two verses together, we understand that the believers who cry, “Abba, Father,” do so by incorporating the operation of the Spirit of the Son within their spirit as the leading part of their heart. As expressed in Romans 8:15, the believers’ incorporation is of the Son; as expressed in Galatians 4:6, the believers’ incorporation is of the Spirit, who, in turn, as the Spirit of the Son, incorporates the Son. Nevertheless, there is but one action, the believers inwardly (i.e., in their spirit and in their heart) crying, “Abba, Father,” but in this one action the believers incorporate the operation of the Spirit and the operation of Son to thereby acknowledge deeply and intimately that they (the believers) are the sons of God. That cry is the genuine reflex of actual sons thoroughly pervaded by the reality of the Son of God Himself, that is, by the Spirit as the reality of Christ through His incorporation of Christ within the believers. For Paul the believers’ experience of this inward cry is

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both through an operation of Christ Himself (Rom. 8:15) and through an operation of the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6).

In Romans 8:15-16 Paul also points to the operation of the Spirit in the believers in that, first, he mentions the spirit of sonship, and second, he speaks of the Spirit witnessing with the believers' spirit. While the spirit of sonship refers directly to the believers' human spirit, that spirit can be of sonship only because the Spirit of the Son indwells it; thus, the spirit of sonship is, in fact, a muted reference to the believers' incorporation of the Spirit of the Son. Paul is more direct in verse 16 when he says that "the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God." Deep within the believers is an abiding sense that they are children of God, and this sense is in fact the operation of the Spirit within them witnessing to their identity as children of God. The believers have this confident sense because they incorporate the Spirit's operation within their human spirit. This sense testifies to the most basic form of their organic relationship to God the Father, not necessarily as sons, which implies their maturity in life, but simply as children, which depends on their having been born of God through regeneration.

As I have before, I would like to comment generally on the biblical concept of sonship insofar as it relates to the notion of incorporation. The Bible version used in this article (Recovery Version) renders the Greek word *huiothesia* as "sonship" (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph 1:5), in distinction to most other English versions, which render the word as "adoption" or some variant thereof. The majority rendering is natural enough, in that conceptually it is not easy to understand how God can make human beings His sons except through some declaratory or legal way. Further, Paul uses the term in a few places (Rom. 8:23; 9:4) with reference to one of the legal benefits of being sons, that is, inheritance. But the question is: Is the legal concept of adoption in full accord with what the New Testament teaches about the way God makes human beings His sons? Happily, it does not seem to be, for there are at least two particular New Testament truths related to the believers as the sons of God which are not adequately conveyed by the concept of adoption: the divine birth of the believers and the incorporation of the Son and the Spirit of the Son in the believers. While a full examination of the truth related to the divine birth is beyond the theme of this article, it is perhaps sufficient to note here that the New Testament clearly teaches that human beings become the children of God through an organic process, not a legal one. They are said to be born anew, born of the Spirit, begotten of God, regenerated, and that of incorruptible seed (John 1:13; 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; James 1:18, 21; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). Thus, there is an

organic reality which underlies the believers' identity as children and sons of God, a reality based in the divine life of God and actuated through the divine birth that the believers experience at regeneration. Unlike an adoption in any usual sense of the term, the believers' becoming the children of God is through birth and by life, the divine life of God the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Further, what God the Father does in begetting human beings as His sons testifies to His generative function as Father, not to an inability to have children, as adoption in any usual sense of the term does. Personally, I find the concept that God adopts children a bit at odds with the reality of His eternal paternity. God is eternally the Father and eternally able to give life as a Father; thus, to say that His believers are His adopted sons is awkward and not in line with His genuine Fatherhood. Of course, the notion of adoption fits the natural concept of many because in point of fact the human beings who become sons of God are already in existence when they are made His sons and do not come into existence as created beings through the act of being made His sons. Adoption is the act of making someone (who obviously has already been born of someone else) a legal child and heir of the adoptive parents; what the adoptee is naturally and organically is not affected by the legal action. But here again the notion of adoption is at odds with the truth of the New Testament because through God's salvation every believer becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and enjoys the new life of God. While each believer has come into physical existence through his or her natural birth by earthly parents, what each believer is in Christ is in reality something newly created according to the divine life of God and thus indeed has a genuine birth. Thus, in God's salvation every believer is affected both naturally and organically; a new life—the divine life of God—and a new nature are imparted, and every believer is a new creation. Sadly, those who insist on an adoptive relationship with God must either deny or ignore the divine and mystical reality of the believers being born of God by His divine life and becoming a new creation in Christ. But let us be clear that according to the teaching of the New Testament God does not adopt human beings of the old creation to be His sons but rather regenerates them with His divine life to make them each a new creation in His Son and genuinely—that is, according to His life and nature—His children and sons.

In addition to the divine life with its nature that makes the believers genuine sons of God, there is also the Spirit as the reality of the Son within the believers who constantly witnesses and attests to their genuine sonship in Christ. Human adoptees, if they know that they are adopted, live with the constant sense that they are not natural children of their adoptive parents. This may not matter practically, as adoptive parents generally love their

adopted children as much as they would natural ones. But the natural and organic identity cannot be loved into existence and may from time to time betray the actual relationship, even in adopted children who do not know that they are adopted. Unlike adopted children, the believers have a constant inner witness, from God the Spirit Himself, that they are sons of God. And this witness is not simply testimonial; it is, as we have seen, an incorporation of the Spirit as the reality of the Son of God in the believers. On the one hand, the Spirit is within them, crying, "Abba, Father!" as the reality of the Son (Gal. 4:6), but on the other hand, they incorporate the Spirit as the reality of the Son within them, and they themselves cry, "Abba, Father!" as sons of God in reality (Rom. 8:15). They are sons of God by incorporation into the unique Son of God. Thus, the believers are genuinely sons of God, not adopted at all, because they have been born of God, possess His divine life and nature, are new creations in Christ, incorporate the unique Son of God inwardly, and bear the Spirit's operation to testify inwardly to their sonship. When they cry, "Abba, Father!" inwardly, they cry as genuine sons of God and not as adopted ones. There is no adoption in God's economy, and neither should we understand Paul's use of the Greek word *huiiothesia* as pointing to adoption.

### *In the General Experience of Salvation*

The following verses, which offer further instances of the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit in their full salvation, are difficult to encompass in a cogent category. This is a bit of a catch-all category, but it seems that all these instances refer to the believers' experience of God's salvation viewed generally and as a whole. Because of their general nature, I have placed these verses before others below which relate to specific facets of God's full salvation (sanctification, renewing, transformation, reigning in life, and glorification). In arranging the verses here, I am following the order of the believers' incorporation of the operations of God generally, then of the Son, and finally of the Spirit.

So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13)

For God did not appoint us to wrath but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for

us in order that whether we watch or sleep, we may live together with Him. (1 Thes. 5:9-10)

And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith. (Phil. 3:9)

For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. (Phil. 1:19-20)

For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death. (Rom. 8:2)

That the righteous requirement of the law might be ful-

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filled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. (Rom. 8:4)

Paul tells the Philippians to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and this is clearly an endeavor on the part of the believers. Alford clarifies the ambiguity in the English translation of the Greek verb for "work out," pointing out that the salvation here

is *begun* with justification by faith, but must be carried out, brought to an issue, by sanctification of the Spirit...For this reason, the [English Version,] "*work out your own salvation,*" is bad, because ambiguous, giving the idea that the salvation is a thing to be gotten, brought in and brought about, by ourselves. (3:170)

The believers enter into God's full salvation through regeneration (Titus 3:5), but it remains for them to reach the full expression of that salvation, that is, their glorification according to the pattern of Christ Jesus in the preceding verses. In speaking of the believers' "own salvation," Paul implies that their salvation is patterned after Christ's exaltation in glory as well as His obedience that led to that glory (Alford 3:170). As Christ obeyed and entered into glory, the believers, Paul exhorts, must

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carry out their own salvation by obedience in order to be glorified by the Father. Paul further points out that this carrying out of salvation is not merely an endeavor on the part of the believers, nor can it be. Though it requires their deliberate and intensely watchful obedience, this depends on God's operation within them. "It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." There is an excellent play on words here in Paul's Greek in that he uses the verb *katergô* ("work out" or "work forth") to characterize the believers' action and the verb *energô* ("work within") to characterize God's operation. The believers can work forth their salvation to its ultimate goal because ("for") God is working within them. His working within, His divine operation, effects (not simply affects) both the believers' inward willing and inward acting (again the verb *energô*) for them to work forth their salvation to its ultimate goal of glory, which is God's good pleasure (Heb. 2:10). Thus, the believers work forth their salvation by incorporating God's operation within them. While it is certainly their endeavor, it is not merely their endeavor, for the endeavor incorporates the God who operates within them. In practical terms, the endeavor is "to obey the inner operating God" (Recovery Version, Phil. 2:13, note 1). Obedience, in this context, cannot simply be to some external pattern of behavior, although the pattern of Christ's humility in human life and exaltation to glory provides a genuine guide for the believers (vv. 5-11); rather, it must be to the only actual means by which the believers can genuinely attain to that pattern, that is, to the operation of God within them, which, we may be assured, is according to the pattern of Christ's obedience.

**I**n 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 Paul says that God has appointed the believers not to wrath, as is the default appointment of all humankind in Adam, but to the obtaining of salvation. This is not salvation from eternal perdition but, as the preceding context shows (vv. 3-8), salvation from the destruction attendant to the Lord's return. The believers will obtain this salvation by living a life that matches Paul's description in verses 4 through 8—not in darkness but as sons of light, not sleeping but watching, not as in a drunken stupor but sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate to protect their hearts and the hope for that eventual salvation as a helmet to protect their minds. The obtaining of this salvation is further "through our Lord Jesus Christ," and by this crucial modifier we understand how the living previously described can be lived. The believers can have such a life through the operation of Jesus Christ within them, that is, through their incorporation of Jesus Christ. Paul's word in verse 10 confirms this. Here he mentions for the first time clearly in his writings what we have seen him often say later in other places, that Christ died so that the believers "may live together with Him." This living together with Christ equals the life that Paul describes in

verses 4 through 8, which results in the believers' obtaining of salvation. Thus, "through our Lord Jesus Christ" refers not to some action by the Lord at His coming but to His operation within the believers throughout this age to prepare them for His coming and for salvation from destruction at His coming. They obtain this salvation through their incorporation of the operation of Jesus Christ within them as they live with Him throughout their entire Christian life.

For himself, and we may assume for all the believers likewise, Paul hoped to be found in Christ (Phil. 3:9). Again, he uses his signature mystical phrase, which in itself refers to incorporation. It cannot be dismissed as simply referring to an association or adherence to Christ because Paul's further description of the phrase refers to a living that expresses the operation of Christ within him. The righteousness that he speaks of was something that could be manifested in his living, since by it he could be "found" to be in Christ by others. It was not an imputed or forensic righteousness but a righteousness expressed in human living. Further, the righteousness that he sought to express was not to be an expression of his own efforts to keep the law, which formerly he zealously attempted to do (v. 6). Rather, he sought to express a righteousness in his living "through faith in Christ." The Greek phrase here is literally "faith of Christ," and its sense is not merely objective (i.e., taking Christ as the object of the believers' faith) but more subjective (i.e., taking Christ as the source and element of the believing ability), as we saw above in Galatians 2:20. Paul's hope was to be found by others living a life that expressed a righteousness which issued from his faith, a faith that incorporated the operation of Christ within him, rather than a righteousness which relied solely on his efforts, apart from God, to keep the law. This kind of righteousness, Paul continues, is "out of God," and this also indicates that the righteousness that Paul hoped to be found in was a righteousness that issued from God's operation within Him. Thus, Paul further points to the believers' incorporation of the operation of God.

**E**arlier in his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul speaks of salvation in a comprehensive way and describes it as incorporating the operations of Christ and the Spirit within him (1:19-20). Paul's utterance in these two verses is rich and packed with many modifiers to express his deep understanding of the realities he was experiencing at the time, but at the core of his full utterance is this: salvation through the Spirit according to the hope that Christ would be magnified in his physical living or even dying. The salvation that Paul sought is not what we might commonly expect, that is, his release from prison; rather, he sought a transcendent salvation that was according to his deep hope that Christ would be magnified in his body. Further, Paul's hope and expectation was

not simply that he would be known as an adherent of Christ; he was imprisoned precisely because everyone knew he was an adherent of Christ, even if technically the charges against him were otherwise. Paul's hope was that in going through his imprisonment, even if it meant finally dying because of it, he would at no time be put to shame by failing to manifest the Christ who lived and operated within him. To his mind, anything short of manifesting Christ visibly "in [his] body" would have been a shame to him, for he lived, in every situation, to manifest Christ. Paul's desire was to incorporate Christ's operation in his every action and to thereby manifest Christ openly to all around him. He desired that the saints in Philippi would pray for this kind of salvation for him, and he understood that their prayers could move God to operate through His Spirit within him for this kind of salvation. He understood clearly that this kind of salvation—the salvation of magnifying Christ—required the operation of the Spirit within him. While it was Christ who was being magnified in Paul's body, it was the Spirit who was operating within him to actuate such a magnification. Thus, the Spirit's operation in Paul resulted in the expression of Christ through him, and again we see the Spirit's basic function to make Christ real within the believers. It is not that the Spirit represents Christ within the believers; rather, what is manifest through the Spirit's operation is simply Christ Himself. If we hold to the view, long held by the theologians of the church even if not recognized, taught, and confessed by many common teachers, that the three of the Divine Trinity are inseparable and that when one of the three acts, all three operate, then we should understand that when the Spirit acted in Paul, Christ operated through that action and was manifested in Paul's visible physical living. The Spirit incorporated Christ's operation, and through the Spirit Paul was able to manifest Christ openly and in reality.

The further confirmation of this matter is in the title that Paul uses to characterize the Spirit here: *the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. Titles such as this point to the Spirit's unique function to make Christ real to the believers. When the Spirit moves within the believers, we should not expect that He does so separably from Christ and the Father; rather, we should expect that He likewise incorporates the operations of Christ and the Father, and for that reason He is rightly and variously called *the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, *the Spirit of Christ*, *the Spirit of Jesus*, or *the Spirit of God*, depending on whose operation is the focus of His incorporation in a given context. In the context of his imprisonment, Paul saw fit to characterize the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, probably in reference to both the humanity and the resurrected state of Jesus

Christ. To undergo the sufferings in his imprisonment, Paul needed Jesus' operation within him as a genuine human being who had suffered in His human life, and for the transcendence of magnifying Him in such a situation, Paul needed Christ's operation within him as One who had resurrected from the dead and was now ascended and in glory. The one person, Jesus Christ, incorporated in the Spirit, operated within Paul in both a most human and a most resurrected way so that Paul could live a life that transcended mere human imprisonment and magnified the Christ whom He loved and lived for. Even in the most disappointing of circumstances Paul sought, and even asked the Philippians to pray that he could have, a living that incorporated the operations of Christ and the Spirit so that through that operation within him he could magnify Christ in his physical living and, if necessary, in his dying in prison. This, for Paul, was salvation.

The last two verses above refer to general characteristics of the salvation that the believers experience through

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their incorporation of the operations of the Spirit within them, particularly as their experience relates to the laws that Paul spoke of in Romans 7. In Romans 8:2 Paul offers the law of the Spirit of life as the solution to the woes that accompany the body of death with its law of sin in Romans 7:7-25, but the Spirit's benefit of freeing the believers comes "in Christ Jesus." Thus, what the Spirit is able to do for the believers involves Christ as well. Paul's use of his mystical phrase *in Christ Jesus* here indicates that Christ is related to the believers not merely as their outward Savior but more significantly as the realm and condition of their daily Christian life. They are in Christ, and because of this they enjoy the benefit of freedom from the law of sin and of death. Yet, this benefit comes to them through the functioning of the Spirit of life within them, whose operation is so thoroughly consistent and effective that Paul characterizes it as a law, a natural principle, within the believers. This natural principle of the Spirit of life stands in opposition to the laws in Romans 7, which lead to consistent failure before God. This benefit of being in Christ Jesus is applied to the believers through the operation of the Spirit of life within them; thus, the Spirit incorporates this benefit within the believers. In keeping with the message of the New Testament elsewhere, Paul indicates that the reality of

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Christ Jesus and the benefits to be derived from Him obtain through the operation of the Spirit within the believers.

In Romans 8:4 Paul continues to say that the believers can do what no other human beings have been able to do, that is, fulfill the righteous requirements of the Old Testament law. But they can do so only through the incorporation of the operation of the Spirit within them. The believers “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit,” and because of this, they are able to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. *The spirit* here refers to the believers’ human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, though this is not uniformly agreed upon in the English translations of this verse. Again, as we saw in Romans 7:6, some interpreters alternatively understand this as a reference to the Holy Spirit directly, and the choice has much to do with their position on the issue of the human being as bipartite or tripartite. Witness Lee offers a fine note on the difficulty of discerning the precise referent of *the spirit* in this chapter before settling on his view of the matter:

It is difficult to discern the word *spirit* used in this chapter, in Gal. 5, and in other places in the New Testament, unless it is clearly designated to denote God’s Holy Spirit or our regenerated human spirit, as in v. 9 and v. 16 of this chapter. According to the usage in the New Testament, the word *spirit*, as used in this verse, denotes our regenerated human spirit indwelt by and mingled with the Spirit, who is the consummation of the Triune God (v. 9). (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:4, note 3)

But either way, indirectly or directly, Paul is speaking of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the believers, which enables them to fulfill the requirements of the law. Gordon D. Fee points out that although Paul says that the believers fulfill the law, he does not do so to emphasize their own activity separate from the Spirit

as though by our walking in keeping with the Spirit we ourselves fulfilled the righteous requirement of Torah. Paul’s theological proclivities would never allow him to put it so carelessly. The emphasis is still and always on the divine initiative and activity. (535)

This “divine initiative and activity,” according to which the believers live and conduct themselves, is the operation of the Spirit within them, and the believers live out this operation, that is, they incorporate this operation, and can thereby fulfill the righteous requirements of the law in their living. Fee continues somewhat later: “The ‘righteous requirement’—the *real aim* of Torah, if you will—is now fulfilled in us by God through his Spirit and is evidenced by the fact of our walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh” (536).

Finally, there is an additional instance of incorporation in Romans 8:4, which could easily escape our notice without some consideration of the grammar and context here. All along we have been saying that the believers fulfill the righteous requirement of the law, and that is no doubt the practical and visible case. But in point of fact, Paul uses a passive construction here and does not explicitly mention the agent of the verb *fulfill*. Verse 4 completes the sentence begun in verse 3, which has God as the subject of an active construction (“God...condemned sin in the flesh”), and His action described in verse 3 takes verse 4 as its purpose, as indicated by the purpose clause construction of verse 4. God condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled, and the bias in the grammar is that the agent of this fulfillment is God Himself and not the believers, *per se*. The fulfillment is “in us” not “by us,” and the preposition is highly significant in that (1) it indicates that the believers are not the agent directly but the “sphere” in which the fulfillment takes place, and (2) it implies that some other agent, namely God, is in operation in the believers. Again, Fee helps to clarify the sense in original language:

Gk. ἐν ὑμῖν [“in us”], which in this case almost certainly is not instrumental, but locative (had Paul intended an instrumental sense, he would surely have followed this passive verb with ὑπό with the genitive). We as His people are the sphere in which God by his Spirit has fulfilled his divine purposes set forth in the Law. (536, note 191)

The believers live out “the divine initiative and activity” of the Spirit in their spirit, and in doing so, they incorporate the operation of the Spirit for the fulfillment of the law. But more finely and more deeply, they incorporate the operation of God to fulfill His desire to see the expression of His righteousness lived out in His people, a righteousness formerly coded and only testified to in the Old Testament law but now genuinely fulfilled in the daily living of the believers through the Spirit’s operation in their spirit.

### *In Being Sanctified, Renewed, and Transformed*

God’s full salvation, beyond its initial justification, includes a number of deeper realities, and some of these are explicitly mentioned in the Epistles as instances of the believers incorporating the operations of God within them.

To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours. (1 Cor. 1:2)

We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised

from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)

And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (Eph. 4:23)

But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Paul tells the Corinthians that they have been sanctified (regardless of their actual condition) and are thus “saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). Their having been sanctified results from their being “in Christ Jesus.” Again, Paul employs his mystical phrase *in Christ Jesus* to indicate that the believers have been incorporated into Christ by God, as he says clearly some verses later: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus” (v. 30). Certainly their having been sanctified and their being saints do not depend on their own merit or condition but is drawn from their being incorporated into Christ. Alford glosses the preposition *in* in verse 2 as “in union with and by means of” (2:474). The believers draw their basic holiness from their union with and by means of Christ, who is in them. This is a positional sanctification by incorporation into Christ. While it does not refer, *per se*, to the holiness that the believers should live out in their Christian life, it is the holiness that forms the real basis of such a sanctified living that is elsewhere also called sanctification (e.g., Rom. 6:19, 22). Because the believers have been put into Christ, they incorporate Christ’s holy nature and status, even if it is only positional at first, and are said to be sanctified and even saints. Their position as “holy ones,” as the Greek word for *saints* literally means, is not hollow, as it depends on the real holiness of Christ, nor is it wishful thinking, as it is powered by the unailing and unailing divine nature in Christ, which will, in time, prevail in the believers to make them holy even dispositionally for eternity.

**I**n a previous section we have noted that the newness of life in Romans 6:4 results from the realities associated with the believers’ baptism. This newness of life is also the result of the believers’ renewing and, as we saw previously, is fully dependent on their incorporation of the operation of Christ in resurrection within them.

In Ephesians 4:23 Paul offers more details about the renewing that the believers experience, and the details involve their incorporation of the operation of the Spirit in their spirit insofar as it relates to their mind. Gordon

Fee comments on the problematic phrase *the spirit of your mind*, which is unique here in all of Paul’s writings. He takes *the spirit* as “yet another instance where we should recognize the human spirit as the first referent, but be prepared also to recognize the Holy Spirit as hovering nearby, since in Paul’s own theology, such renewal is indeed the work of the Spirit” (712). This is the same double reference that we have seen in other passages from Paul above and is not particularly challenging. What requires more consideration is that this spirit is “of the mind.” Fee navigates gingerly through a few considerations of what this modifier could mean and finally settles on the view (I think) that the whole phrase *the spirit of your mind* refers to a mode of inner life that probably escaped the comprehension of the original recipients of Paul’s letter (and, it seems, that of Fee himself). There may be a slight preference in his presentation for the view that the phrase refers to the renewal of the mind by the S/spirit, but honestly, the preference is not altogether clear. At any rate, it seems clear that Paul refers here to

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the Spirit in the spirit of the believers and characterizes the S/spirit as now being of the believers’ mind, the most active and deliberate part of their being. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the Spirit in the spirit of the believers can so pervade the thinking of the believers that the Spirit becomes their thinking, their mind, and that this renews the believers, particularly in their thinking. This need not mean that the Spirit replaces the mind of the believers; rather, their thinking now incorporates the divine mind and expresses it. If this is indeed the case, the spirit of the mind is also the mind of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:16), but greater emphasis is placed here on the Spirit in operation within the spirit of the believers because it is the Spirit who renews the believers.

**O**ne of the deepest experiential passages in the New Testament is found at the end of 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul refers to the believers’ experience of transformation through fellowship with the Lord. Here Paul details the experiential benefit of the New Testament ministry, which comes to the believers through his and his fellow apostles’ service. Unlike the ministry of Moses in the Old Testament, which offered a fading glory on the transfigured face of its minister (v. 13), the

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New Testament ministry allows its ministers in Christ (v. 14) to gaze upon the glory of the Lord and to be transformed into the same image with an ever-progressing glory. What the apostles do in their ministry is for the believers, and thus, what the apostles experience in their ministry is representative of what the believers can and should experience through the New Testament ministry of the apostles. While *we* here refers first to the apostles as the ministers of the new covenant, it is no doubt Paul's intention that *we* also includes all the believers, who equally can and should enjoy the benefit of the New Testament ministry, particularly its power to transform the believers in Christ into the same image with an ever-progressing glory. The image into which the believers are being transformed is that which they behold as the glory of the Lord. What they see through the function of the New Testament ministry is what they become gradually. The New Testament ministry presents the glory of the Lord, and as the believers behold His glory in the ministry, they are being transformed into the same image, that is, the image of the glorious Lord. The transformation is progressive and is characterized as being "from glory to glory," and the glory here must be understood to be a glory that expresses the Lord whose glory they behold. The glory of the Lord, therefore, is transferred to them but not in an unfading way, as was the glory on Moses' face under the ministry of the old covenant; rather, the New Testament believers become bearers of an ongoing glory that continually reflects the glorious Lord and expresses Him unto eternity. This process of glory, Paul tells us, is "from the Lord Spirit," and for now we can focus on the fact that this transformation in glory proceeds from the Spirit. (In an earlier article I examined the meaning of this compound title *Lord Spirit* and hopefully demonstrated adequately that in itself it expresses the incorporation of Christ's operation in the function of the Spirit.)

The Spirit operates in the ministry of the apostles and provides the divine way for the glory of the Lord to be expressed and beheld firstly by the apostles themselves and subsequently by the believers. Thus, as the apostles serve, they incorporate the operation of the Spirit (who incorporates the operation of Christ the Lord), and the glory of the Lord is expressed in their ministry. But their ministering is not an end in itself. Their ministry must have its fruit in the believers, and the fruit is the believers' transformation into the glorious image of Christ that they behold in the ministry. As He did in the apostles through whom the ministry is given, the Spirit also operates in the believers who receive the ministry. The believers, when they receive the ministry, incorporate the operation of the Spirit within them, who makes the glory of the Lord real within them, and this operation progressively transforms them from one degree of glory to another until they reach full glory in Christ.

### *In Reigning in Life*

In Romans 5 Paul succinctly characterizes the believers' highest experience of God's full salvation as their reigning in life through grace. This reigning is through their incorporation of Christ in their Christian life.

For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

In order that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:21)

In the former verse the believers are said to reign, but in the latter grace is said to reign. Paul is probably referring to the same reality in both instances but from different perspectives. In the former he characterizes the believers as ones who receive the abundance of grace and, as a result, reign in life. In the latter he focuses on grace itself reigning. But grace cannot reign in the abstract; rather, it reigns because the believers partake of it and, energized by it, live a reigning life. Further, Paul points out in the former verse that the believers also receive "the abundance...of the gift of righteousness," and this, too, relates to their reigning in life, but in the latter verse he is more explicit in expressing how it relates. The reigning is "through righteousness," and by this Paul seems to be referring to righteousness both as the basis for and as the result of the believers' experience of grace, as Witness Lee notes,

Righteousness is the footing, the base, and the means for God to dispense Himself to us as grace. This righteousness gives us the ground to claim Christ as our grace. By giving grace to us, God manifests His righteousness (see 1:17). Furthermore, the power of this grace operates in us and produces subjective righteousness, making us right with God, with others, and even with ourselves; and it not only subdues sin but also overcomes Satan and death in our being. Thus grace reigns through righteousness, resulting in eternal life. (Recovery Version, Rom. 5:21, note 2)

Thus, for Paul the believers can reign in life because grace and righteousness abound in their lives to such an extent that their lives can be characterized as the reigning of grace itself through their righteous living. But what is more significant here, at least as it relates to the theme of this article, is that in both these verses the reigning is "through Jesus Christ." Christ should not be understood as simply supplying a judicial basis for which the believers experience grace to reign in life, though He certainly does. Rather, as is consistent with his thought throughout

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chapters 5 through 8, Paul is no doubt referring to the resurrected and victorious Christ as the incorporate basis for the believers' experience of reigning in life. Christ rose from the dead and overcame sin and death personally, and while He did so, all His believers, who were incorporated into His resurrection, were in reality brought into victory over sin and death. Now He lives in resurrection within the believers and within them operates so that they can, in practical experience, overcome sin and death, that is, reign in life. They reign through Him, not apart from Him nor merely based on the objective facts of His death and resurrection. This reigning through Jesus Christ can only be through their incorporation of the operation of Jesus Christ within them, the One who, by His own merit, reigns over sin and death.

### *In Being Glorified*

The goal of God's full salvation is the glorification of the believers, and while this is to their great benefit, glorification is not actually for their benefit as much as it is for God's. The believers will be glorified in order that God can be glorified, and their glorification will not simply be representative of God's glory, as though the believers will glorify Him apart and separately from Him and have their own glory of some sort. Rather, their glorification will manifest God's glory, and this can only be through their incorporation of God as their glory. This is indicated, either directly or indicated, in a several place in the Epistles.

When He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed (because our testimony to you was believed) in that day. (2 Thes. 1:10)

Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory, according to His operation by which He is able even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil. 3:21)

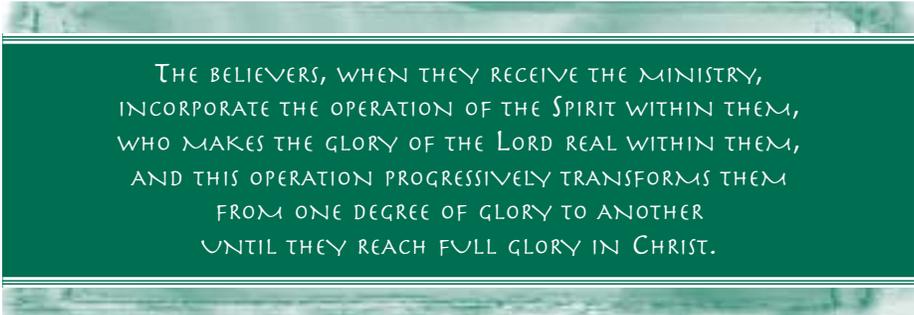
But the God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual one...And

even as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:44, 49, 53)

Paul tells the Thessalonians that Christ the Lord will come again "to be glorified in His saints" (2 Thes. 1:10). It is difficult, though not impossible, to water this down to mean that somehow Christ will achieve open praises through the merits of His saints, but the easier interpretation is the one that more naturally matches the literal reading of the text, i.e., that Christ will in a real sense be glorified within His saints. Of course, Christ will come with His own distinguishable glory, which will be manifest to all. But what will also be manifest is that the believers express the Christ of glory within them, and this will be a source of great marvel to even the unbelievers. Alford follows the literal reading and observes that Christ will be glorified "not 'through'...nor 'among [the believers]:' but *they* will be the *element* of His glorifica-



THE BELIEVERS, WHEN THEY RECEIVE THE MINISTRY,  
INCORPORATE THE OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT WITHIN THEM,  
WHO MAKES THE GLORY OF THE LORD REAL WITHIN THEM,  
AND THIS OPERATION PROGRESSIVELY TRANSFORMS THEM  
FROM ONE DEGREE OF GLORY TO ANOTHER  
UNTIL THEY REACH FULL GLORY IN CHRIST.

tion: He will be glorified *in* them, just as the Sun is reflected in a mirror" (3:286). Thus, the glory that the believers will have at Christ's coming will not be an independent glory of their own but the glory of Christ and from Christ Himself. If we are to conceive how this could be, we have to rely on the fact, well established elsewhere in the New Testament, that Christ is in the believers, and we must understand that they glorify Him by incorporating Him in their living. The remarks of Witness Lee are again quite salient:

The Lord is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8); He was glorified in His resurrection and ascension (John 17:1; Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:9). Now He is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) to bring us into glory (Heb. 2:10). At His coming back, on the one hand He will come from the heavens with glory (Rev. 10:1; Matt. 25:31), and on the other hand He will be glorified in His saints; that is, His glory will be manifested from within His members, causing their body of humiliation to be transfigured into His glory, conforming it to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). Thus, the unbelievers will marvel at Him, admire Him, wonder at Him, in us, His believers. (Recovery Version, 2 Thes. 1:10, note 1)

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In Philippians 3:21, a verse that Witness Lee comments on above, Paul indicates that the glorification of the believers occurs through a process of transfiguration, whereby the body of the believers is made to conform to Christ's own glorified body. Were he to have concluded his sentence with the simple statement of this fact, we would be justified in concluding that this conformation is to happen separately from Christ, as many Christians commonly understand. But Paul continues the sentence and provides the "mechanics" of how the body of the believers' humiliation will be conformed to the body of Christ's glory; it will be "according to His operation by which He is able even to subject all things to Himself." Such an operation must be within the believers, and, as we have seen elsewhere, this is the significance of the Greek word for *operation* (*energeia*, based on the verb *energō*, "to work within"). The inward operation "by which He is able even to subject all things to Himself" is "the operation of the might of [God's] strength" which God "caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies" in order to subject "all things under His feet" (Eph. 1:19-22).

In Ephesians Paul views Christ's resurrection, ascension, and the consequent subjection of all things to Him as the operation of God the Father; here in Philippians 3:21 he views the subjection of all things (which, he implies, comes out of His glorification in resurrection) as an operation of Christ Himself. As I have pointed out in an earlier article in this series, these two views by Paul point to Christ's incorporation of the operation of the Father in Christ's resurrection, ascension, and subjecting of all things. But here I wish to point out that that same incorporate operation will operate in the believers to transfigure the bodies of their humiliation and conform them to His glorified body. They will incorporate that operation and, in doing so, will glorify the divine Operators within them.

In his first Epistle Peter tells the believers that the God of all grace is the One who has called them "into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus" (5:10). Two points should be made here. First, in line with what we have seen above, the glory that the believers are to participate in, the glory into which they have been called, is God's glory, not their own. In saying that the God of all grace calls the believers into His glory, Peter implies that the believers will incorporate the God of all grace in their Christian life in this age and, as a result, will manifest Him in glory in the next age. Second, God's calling into His glory is "in Christ Jesus," and this must be understood as a further instance of Christ's incorporating the operation of God, here to call the believers into God's glory. God has called the believers into glory in Christ; that is, He has incorporated them into Him and positioned them to undergo the

process by which He will ultimately be glorified in His believers and in Christ Jesus (cf. Eph. 3:21). In that glorious end, the believers will incorporate God and Christ to express God in glory.

We need only mention in passing 2 Corinthians 3:18. In an earlier section we considered the believers' incorporation of the Spirit in their being transformed. That transformation is "from glory to glory," and thus, in process and in result it manifests the glory of the Lord. Here we should notice that the result, the final stage, of the believers' transformation is that they themselves will bear the image of the Lord in glory. Such an image comes through their beholding and reflecting (as the Greek word here indicates) the glory of the Lord inwardly. This all happens within their heart, which has inwardly turned to the Lord (v. 16). When they turn their hearts to the Lord and behold and reflect Him, He shines through them as their glory. Glory, then, turns out to be the believers' incorporation of the Lord within them in order to express Him to all.

The final portion that we will consider actually involves four references to the believers' incorporation of the Triune God, but they are muted and could easily go unnoticed without some deliberate scrutiny. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 Paul speaks of a spiritual body, and at first blush this might seem to refer to a body that is spiritualized somehow or in a spiritual state (as opposed to a physical one). But this is not in keeping with Paul's use of the Greek adjective *pneumatikos* elsewhere in all his Epistles. Gordon Fee, in his massive work on the Holy Spirit in Paul's letters, makes the point in several places that the Greek adjective is not to be understood as referring to a spiritual quality (as our English adjective *spiritual* does) but to the Holy Spirit Himself. On this point, after an impressive review of Paul's use of the adjective, he concludes,

All of this is to say that the small case "spiritual" probably should be eliminated from our vocabulary, when it comes to this word in the Pauline corpus...For Paul it is an adjective that primarily refers to the Spirit of God, even when the contrasts are to "earthly" bodies and "material support."  
(32)

Thus, here in 1 Corinthians 15 we should understand that Paul is referring to a Spirit body, that is, "a body that belongs to the Spirit in its final 'glorified, imperishable' expression" (Fee 263). More finely, if we accept the tripartite view of the human being which I and many other students of the Bible subscribe to, this "spiritual body is a resurrected body saturated by the spirit, a body in which the spirit predominates" (Recovery Version, v. 44, note 1), and this human spirit which predominates the body of the glorified believers is, by their very identity as

New Testament believers, indwelt by and mingled with the Spirit (cf. 6:17). But regardless of the view one takes on biblical anthropology, the Spirit within the believers is what will make their final glorified bodies “spiritual,” and thus, the believers even in their physical bodies will incorporate the Spirit’s operation to make them glorious.

Some verses later Paul speaks of the believers finally bearing the image of the heavenly (15:49) and putting on incorruption and immortality (v. 53). These three substantives, though referring to abstract qualities, imply that God Himself will be within the believers as the source of their expression of these abstract qualities. In verse 48 Paul refers to Christ directly as “the heavenly,” and in saying in verse 49 that the believers “will also bear the image of the heavenly,” he is repeating the notion, seen elsewhere in his Epistles, that the believers will express Christ by bearing His image. Again, this will not happen apart from Christ but because Christ is in them and because they will incorporate Him as their glory. Then, in verse 53 Paul, using language that is more in keeping with the concept of incorporation, says that the believers will “put on” incorruption and immortality. Both these attributes are uniquely characteristics of God (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16), and for the believers to put these attributes on is for them to put on God. When they put on God, they incorporate Him with His attributes and express these attributes as characteristics of their ultimate glorification. In the final analysis, the believers will be glorified by incorporating God in Christ as the Spirit, who alone is glory, incorruption, and immortality.

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In what has preceded in this article, I hope that I have adequately shown that the believers experience God’s full salvation not merely as beneficiaries separate and independent from God but more intrinsically as participants in the Triune God’s operation within them. While the New Testament does not always indicate that in the experience of God’s full salvation the believers incorporate the operations of the Triune God, it does so with sufficient frequency to convince us that salvation for the believers is through this incorporation. Contrary to any natural concept about the Christian life, the believers are not mere recipients of the actions of an external God; rather, they manifest what God is doing through them, and thus, their salvation is God’s actual operation within them. The writers of the New Testament expressed this incorporation in ways that have by now pervaded the ways in which Christians speak today (e.g., “my brother

in Christ”; “I love you in the Lord”; “in Jesus’ name we pray”; and so on), but their expressions were drawn from realities that the writers themselves genuinely experienced and newly pioneered. Admittedly, the characteristic of incorporation in the believers’ experience of God’s full salvation can escape our notice today, especially in view of the meanings that have since been loaded onto their ways of expressing it, but if we attend carefully to this detail, as we have in this article, we begin to realize that the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God is not an accidental or incidental characteristic of the believers’ full salvation; it is, in fact, what saves them. Without this, the believers would be mere human beings who live and act independently of God, as highly moral and ethical unbelievers have done for ages; with this, the believers are agents of God’s operation within, living out what God is and what He is doing within them.

This is what gives their Christian life a genuinely divine factor that sets it apart from mere human virtue. If we

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accept the testimony of the New Testament to attribute the intrinsic value that the believers have to the operation of God within them, we understand that it is this operation, and not their own natural virtue, that defines them as New Testament believers. In the articles to come I hope to continue to demonstrate that we common believers can and should live and serve God, not by our own will, concept, virtue, or power, but by God’s constant operation in Christ as the Spirit in our spirit. This, I believe, should revolutionize our Christian and church life. **AC**

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