

# The Promise, Authoring, and Corporate Inheritance of Salvation as Deification in the Epistle to the Hebrews

by John Pester

In response to a general falling away from the faith, the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to believers who were short in their understanding of the superior content of the Christian confession. With little understanding and less appreciation, these believers were in danger of drifting away from the promise of deification through their neglect of the great salvation authored by Jesus as an Apostle and High Priest. Hebrews is an expansive speaking of God concerning the promise of our inheritance, our deification, in Christ, and it is an extensive exhortation to give heed to the things concerning this great salvation so that we would not come short of God's desire to bring us to maturity as His deified sons (2:1, 3; 4:1; 6:1).

Consequently, Hebrews unveils the desire and the willingness of God to fulfill His promise of deification—a promise that God would be made man in order to make man God—in and through the person and work of Christ as an Apostle and High Priest, so that this promise could be inherited as salvation by those who are willing to run the race to obtain the promise of deification through faith in the age of grace (v. 12; 11:39; 12:1).

Through their neglect of this great salvation, the Hebrew believers were in a perilous situation and in need of warnings and exhortations in order to advance beyond the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God (6:1; 5:12). The condition of the Hebrew believers, who were dull of hearing (v. 11), who hardened their hearts to the voice of the Lord (3:8, 15; 4:7), who displeased God in their failure to enter into His promise (3:17; 4:11), and who held the person and work of Christ as a common thing (10:29), should be a warning to us all to consider the content of our faith (3:1; 4:14; 10:23), so that this content can profit us by bringing us into the fulfillment of God's promised inheritance through our deification as His corporate expression (4:2-3).

Today, many believers are drifting and are at risk of receiving a just recompense for failing to understand, appreciate, and experience the great salvation that God has authored for us (2:2-3). Thankfully, the speaking of God in the Son in Hebrews is still living and operative. As holy brothers, who have been made partakers of a heavenly calling (3:1), we need to consider this speaking, which unveils the corporate fulfillment of the promise of deification according to a pattern authored by the Son in His incarnation as an Apostle superior to Moses and in His resurrection and ascension as a High Priest superior to Aaron. If we allow the words of this speaking to be mixed with faith, the heavenly ministry of Christ, which is unveiled in Hebrews, will save us to the uttermost by imparting the divine life into us and by deifying us for God's corporate expression through the operation of the law of life.

## The Promise of Deification in the Epistle to the Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews, as a whole, is focused on the believers' corporate inheritance of God's promise of deification. As believers, we have been called to receive this promise as an eternal inheritance (9:15); hence, we are heirs of the promise (6:17). The promise that the believers will inherit is associated with the term *salvation* in 1:14. Our eternal inheritance is an eternal salvation that includes more than just the traditional understanding of salvation as redemption (5:9).<sup>1</sup> The source, the Author, of this eternal salvation is the Son of God in His divinity, who became a man through incarnation, Jesus, and who also was deified to be the Son of God in His humanity through resurrection so that He could, in turn, deify the believers in His ascension through His heavenly ministry as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (2:10; 5:7-10).

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A promise of deification undergirds the entire Epistle to the Hebrews, and the fulfillment of this promise is revealed in relation to the Son, to the believers under the new covenant, and even to the people of God under the old covenant. Hebrews begins with a reference to the Son in His status as both God and man, speaking first of His status as the firstborn Son, a deified man, who has been appointed Heir of all things, and then of His status as the only begotten Son, who made the universe (1:2). As the Firstborn, Christ has been appointed Heir of all things because He inherited a more distinguished name in His resurrection and ascension (v. 4). The more distinguished name that Christ inherited in His humanity as the Firstborn is a name that could only be bestowed upon Him based on the deification of His humanity in resurrection—the name of Son:

For to which of the angels has He ever said, “You are My Son; this day have I begotten You”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him, and He will be a Son to Me”? And when He brings again the Firstborn into the inhabited earth, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” (vv. 5-6)

According to verses 4 through 6, the Son who was begotten in His humanity on the day of resurrection is identified as the Firstborn. Consequently, His inheritance of the more distinguished name of Son is a confirmation of the deification of His humanity (Acts 13:33), because the inheritance of a more distinguished name is possible only in relation to His humanity, which He took upon Himself through incarnation. As the only begotten Son, He eternally possesses the name of Son by virtue of His divinity; hence, there was nothing for Him to inherit that He did not already possess. In His pre-existent divinity He bears the name of Son; in His incarnated and resurrected humanity He inherited the name of Son.

The fulfillment of the promise of deification, which is initially revealed in relation to the Firstborn, is unveiled also in relation to the believers who are living under the new covenant and to the children of promise who lived under the old covenant (Rom. 9:8; Gal. 4:28). As believers, the new covenant is mediated to us, who have been redeemed in order that we might “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). The promise of this eternal inheritance, the promise of a multiplication in life (6:13-14), was ratified with an oath by God in order to show the unchangeableness of His counsel to us as heirs of the promise (v. 17). We are fellow heirs of the promise (11:9), which was given in prefigure to Abraham and fulfilled in prefigure through Isaac and Jacob under the old covenant (6:15), because we are the multiplication of God in life and nature as the many brothers of the Firstborn (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-12). The people of God, who obtained a good testimony through their faith under the old covenant, however, did not obtain the

reality of the fulfillment of the promise, because a pattern of deification had not yet been authored by Jesus Christ in the fullness of time (v. 10; Gal. 4:4). Nevertheless, when the fulfillment of the believers’ corporate inheritance in Christ is manifested in glory, those who bore the testimony of faith under the old covenant will be made perfect as part of God’s corporate expression and thereby obtain and inherit the promise of deification in reality (Heb. 11:39). The eternal inheritance in Hebrews is a promise of perfection, which is a promise of salvation as deification, a promise of being made God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.

### *The Promise of Salvation Being a Promise of Deification*

In Hebrews salvation is synonymous with deification.<sup>2</sup> Although many reflexively recoil at the mere mention of God being made man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, deification is not a heretical idea that illustrates a sinful propensity for self-exaltation.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Hebrews shows that deification is God’s desire, God’s promise; it is the goal of God’s initiated and authored salvation, a salvation that brings many sons into glory, even into the effulgence of God’s glory in the Son (2:10; 1:2-3).

The first reference to salvation in Hebrews 1:14 speaks of the believers’ inheritance of salvation, and the second reference in 2:3 speaks of the possibility of neglecting this salvation. If, as many think, salvation is synonymous with redemption, there would be nothing for us to either inherit or neglect, because we have already obtained God’s eternal redemption (9:12) and received the benefit of this eternal redemption—the forgiveness of our sins and lawlessnesses (10:17-18). In contrast to a limited understanding of salvation as redemption, chapters 1 and 2 of Hebrews present a much fuller understanding of salvation in God’s economical operation.

These chapters reveal that salvation is synonymous with deification because the salvation that was authored in the person and through the work of Christ was consummated with the deification of the humanity of Jesus and with the acknowledgement of the incorporation of His humanity into the Godhead with the full authority of God (1:8). The deification of Jesus, as the Son of Man, began with God becoming a man, which humanized the divinity of Christ through incarnation for the purification of sins and for the destruction of the devil (vv. 9-12, 3; 2:14). In this initial step God was made a little inferior to angels as a man (vv. 7, 9). The process of deification continued when Jesus was made God in His humanity through the divinization of His humanity in resurrection for His enthronement as God and for His inheritance of all things (1:2, 5-8). In this consummate

step man was made God, becoming much better than the angels as the Son (v. 4).<sup>4</sup>

The reality of God being made man in order to make man God was fulfilled in the person and through the work of Christ. This is the essence of the great salvation that He authored. And since the believers are charged to not neglect this great salvation, the process of deification must apply to us as well. In order to not neglect this salvation,<sup>5</sup> we must see that salvation in Hebrews involves the believers' being made God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. As the Son who has been deified in His humanity, He has been anointed with the oil of exultant joy, and as His partners, we have become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead; therefore, "we share with Him this anointing for the fulfillment of God's purpose" (Recovery Version, 1:9, note 2). Although we share His anointing, He will always be "above" us by virtue of His unique possession of the Godhead (v. 9). The great salvation that is spoken of in Hebrews involves the operation of the divine economy that deified the humanity which was assumed by the incarnated Son and the operation of the divine economy that will deify our redeemed humanity.

As the Author of our salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings (2:10), the perfected and deified Firstborn has become "to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (5:9) Through the speaking of the Son, the confirming word of the apostles, and the distributions of the Holy Spirit (2:3-4), the full scope of His person and work can now be received by the believers as grace. As grace, we receive the humanized and divinized life of Jesus with its power (7:16), which, in turn, sustains us to live a heavenly life on earth in order to make us God in life, nature, and corporate expression but not in the Godhead. Consequently, chapters 1 and 2 confirm that the salvation of the believers is the issue of a continuing operation of divinization in the divine economy (4:16), an operation of the law of life which redeems (7:16; 1:3; 2:14-15), sanctifies (v. 11), and glorifies the humanity of the believers (v. 10), making us God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. To the extent that we are persuaded of the better things that belong to salvation (6:9), we will more eagerly await Him as the One who is able to save us to the uttermost according to the pattern of deification that He authored for us as an Apostle and High Priest (9:28; 7:25; 3:1).

### **The Authoring of Deification in the Epistle to the Hebrews**

The promise of salvation as deification is a promise that began in God and that is being carried out by God as the Author of our salvation (2:10). God, as an authoring God, is the predicate for the truth contained in the statement

*God was made man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.* The subject of the first portion of the statement, *God was made man*, is *God*. This is an acknowledgment that the first step in the process of deification was initiated by God through the incarnation of the creating God into a man of His creation, an action which gives deep meaning to His creation of humanity in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26).<sup>6</sup> In effect, God made man so that He could be made man in order to redeem humanity, whom He knew would fall prey to the power of sin and death, and in order to destroy the devil and his works. It was God who sent His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin in order to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). It was God who partook of the blood and flesh of humanity in order to destroy the devil, who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14). And it was God who was manifested for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). The economical step that God took in becoming a man originated in God Himself. Although He existed in the form of God, He did not consider equality with God a treasure to be grasped. Instead, He emptied Himself,

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taking the form of a slave and becoming in the likeness of men. In His incarnation He was found in fashion as a man, and He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death (Phil. 2:6-8). The process of God being made man, consequently, is a reflection of God's will. To think that God could be made man by any agent other than God Himself or by any action other than one carried out by God Himself is to diminish the power of God and to deny His will.<sup>7</sup> Only God Himself could author this step in His economical process of deification.

The implied subject of the second portion of the statement, *in order to make man God*, is still *God*. Only God has the capacity to make man God. It is not possible for man to glorify himself. Even though Christ was fully God, He was also genuinely a man; therefore, He did not glorify Himself from His position as a man (Heb. 5:5). Instead, He prayed to the Father from His position as the Son with divinity, asking the Father to glorify Him in His humanity, along with the Father, with the glory which He had as the divine Son with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). Even though He was the Son of God in

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His divinity and even though this divinity was concealed within the shell of His humanity, He looked to the Father for His glorification as a man in His humanity.

He was God incarnated in the flesh, and His flesh was a tabernacle in which God could dwell on earth (1:14). His divine element was confined in His humanity, just as God's shekinah glory had been concealed within the tabernacle. Once, on the mountain of transfiguration, His divine element was released from within His flesh and expressed in glory, being seen by the three disciples (Matt. 17:1-4; John 1:14). But then it was concealed again in His flesh. Before this prayer He predicted that He would be glorified and that the Father would be glorified in Him (12:23; 13:31-32). Now He was about to pass through death so that the concealing shell of His humanity might be broken and His divine element, His divine life, might be released. Also, He would resurrect that He might uplift His humanity into the divine element and that His divine element might be expressed, with the result that His entire being, His divinity and His humanity, would be glorified...The Father would thus be glorified in Him...Hence, He prayed for this. (Recovery Version, John 17:1, note 1)

God's glorification of the humanity of Jesus occurred on the day of His resurrection. This glorious begetting, which divinized the humanity of Jesus according to the life and nature of God and which, in His case, uplifted His humanity into the Godhead, was initiated by God the Father, who said, "You are My Son; this day have I begotten You" (Heb. 1:5). It was God who highly exalted Jesus, and it was God who bestowed on Him the name which is above every name so that the deification of the humanity of Jesus Christ could be proclaimed in our open confession of Him as Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

The initiation and accomplishment of salvation as deification can be attributed only to God Himself. This is revealed throughout all of God's speaking in the Holy Scriptures. Although the means of His speaking has changed—from His speaking of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets to His speaking in the last of these days to us in the Son (Heb. 1:1-2)—the emphasis of His speaking has not changed. When He spoke of the multiplication of seed in the Old Testament, He was speaking of an enlarged expression of Himself within humanity, and when He speaks of bringing many sons into glory, He is speaking of an enlarged expression of Himself in humanity. Just as the multiplication of seed in the Old Testament was based on God's execution of His promise—"I will multiply" (6:14), the multiplication of seed in the many brothers of the Firstborn is based on God's execution His promise—"it was fitting for Him" (2:10).<sup>8</sup> The authoring of deification comes from God. This can be seen in both the fulfillment

of the promise of deification in Jesus and in the extension of this promise to the believers.

### *The Authoring of the Deification of Jesus*

In the unveiling of the deification of Jesus in Hebrews, the authorship of God is evident. Chapters 1 and 2 speak of the Son of God as God, who is the divine Son in His divinity, being made a man with humanity, and they speak of the Son of Man as man, who is a genuine partaker of blood and flesh (2:14), being made the Son of God in His humanity to express the divinity of God. In the steps of the deification of the humanity of Jesus, the pre-eminent involvement of the One "for whom are all things and through whom are all things" (v. 10), God, is revealed.

As God in His divinity, the Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His divine substance, and as God in His humanity, the Son is also the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of the divine substance (1:3). Whereas He was the effulgence of God's glory in His status as the pre-existent Son in His divinity, He now also is the effulgence of God's glory in His humanity. As the Son of Man, He now expresses the effulgence of God's glory because He bears the substance of divinity in His humanity, having made the purification of sins in His one perfect offering for sin in His humanity,<sup>9</sup> which redeemed humanity and removed the barrier between God and man so that humanity could partake of God's holiness (12:10). The purification of sins was made possible because the Son of God with His divinity was made a little inferior to angels in His incarnation (2:7, 9). In the incarnation God became a man, partaking of flesh and blood, in order to destroy the devil, who has the might of death and who enslaves through the fear of death. In His humanity Jesus tasted death on behalf of everything (vv. 14-15). Even though He was God in His divinity, He was made man by God with genuine humanity to be like His brothers in all things so that ultimately He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God as God (v. 17).

As a man with humanity, Jesus became a deified High Priest in His resurrection:

Christ did not glorify Himself in becoming a High Priest, but it was He who said to Him, "You are My Son; this day have I begotten You"; even as also in another place He says, "You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (5:5-6)

In the resurrection Christ was born in His humanity as the firstborn Son of God, and He was also begotten as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, a divine order that is typified in the Old Testament by one who was "without father, without mother, without

genealogy; having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but likened to the Son of God" (7:3).

For all the important persons in Genesis, except Melchizedek, there is a genealogy. In the divine writing, the Holy Spirit sovereignly gave no account of the beginning of Melchizedek's days or of the end of his life, that he might be a proper type of Christ as the eternal One, as our perpetual High Priest. This corresponds with the presentation of the Son of God in the Gospel of John. Being eternal, the Son of God has no genealogy (John 1:1). But as the Son of Man, Christ does have a genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). (Recovery Version, 7:3, note 1)

**F**or Christ to be a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek indicates that He was divinized in His humanity when He was begotten on the day of His resurrection as the Firstborn. As such a High Priest, He is merciful and faithful in the things pertaining to God because He is God in both His divinity and His humanity (2:17). When God was made man in Jesus through the incarnation, His divinity was humanized, and when man was made God in Jesus through resurrection, His humanity was divinized. Now in the person of Jesus there is both humanized divinity and divinized humanity with both aspects of His person, His divinity and His humanity, bearing the inherited name of Son (1:4-5), which is equal to God's full acknowledgement of Him as God. As the Son of God in His divinity, His throne is the throne of God (v. 8), and as the Son of God with deified humanity, He has been anointed with the oil of exultant joy above His partners (v. 9), His brothers, the believers who are all of One with Him (2:11). Through the believers' participation in His anointing as His partners (1:9), through the believers' inheritance of His salvation (v. 14), and through the believers' sanctification as His brothers (2:11), the God-authored promise of deification, which was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, has been extended to the believers in this age, the believers who are of faith and who have faith (10:39).

### *The Authoring of the Deification of the Believers*

Although there are references to some aspects of the believers' salvation in chapters 1 and 2, these references are limited, and they are presented within the context of the fulfillment of God's promise of deification related to Jesus, not to the believers. There is a reference to the purification of sins (1:3), but this is presented as a confirmation of God's incarnation in Jesus, which enabled His body to be offered once for all (10:10). There is also a reference to the glorification of the believers as the many sons (2:10), but this is presented as a confirmation

of God's deification of Jesus, which was made possible by the perfection attained through His sufferings.<sup>10</sup> The primary emphasis in chapters 1 and 2 is on God's authoring of a pattern of deification in the person and through the work of Jesus which, in turn, has qualified Him to be the Author of our salvation. Although the person and work of Christ cannot be functionally separated, the designation of Christ as Author is a revelation of His person more than of His work, because what God authored—the humanizing of divinity and the divinizing of humanity—was authored in His being.

**A**s the Author of our salvation, Jesus is able to save the believers to the uttermost (7:25) by bringing their redeemed humanity into the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation as deification. The promise of deification can be realized in us because it has been fulfilled in Jesus, who is now ministering the elements of its fulfillment in His being into our being, first into our spirit and then into our soul, as grace (4:12, 16; 10:39). Consequently, after introducing Jesus as the Author of salvation in 2:10, Hebrews begins to speak of our corporate inheritance of

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the promise of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ as an Apostle and a High Priest in verse 17 and in 3:1.

Jesus is now working as both an Apostle and a High Priest<sup>11</sup> in order to fulfill God's promise of our corporate inheritance of salvation in our redeemed humanity. Each aspect of His work as an Apostle and a High Priest corresponds to one of the major steps in the process of God being made man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. As an Apostle greater than Moses (vv. 3-6), the Son of God as God was sent to bring God to man and even into man through incarnation. In His human living, His humanity was constituted to be the building material for God's corporate house, and He was also constituted to be the Builder of God's house through His faithfulness. As an Apostle, God was made man, and in the days of His suffering in the flesh (5:7; 2:9-10, 18), His humanity was constituted, qualified, and approved as a sacrifice (9:26) so that redeemed man could be made God through His resurrection in His humanity as the firstborn Son and High Priest (3:2; 1:5; 5:5). As a High Priest greater than Aaron (4:14—7:28), the work of Jesus brings

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man to God and even into God by imparting the indestructible resurrection life of Christ into redeemed humanity. Now in His work in resurrection and ascension, during the days of our weakness, suffering, and discipline (4:15; 6:12; 12:5-10), Christ is fulfilling God's promise to make us God in life and nature as an enlarged, corporate expression of Himself through His continuous propitiation for our sins (2:17), through His heavenly intercession (7:25), through His mediation of a better covenant that imparts His living laws in our mind and inscribes them on our hearts (8:6, 10), and especially through His speaking in our spirit (3:7, 15; 4:7, 12; 10:15). In His work as an Apostle and High Priest, Jesus Christ is authoring a corporate expression of God in life and nature but not in the Godhead for the fulfillment of His promise of our corporate inheritance of salvation as deification.

### **The Corporate Inheritance of Deification in the Epistle to the Hebrews**

The believers' experience of Christ's divinely authored pattern of God being made man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead results in the believers' corporate inheritance of salvation as deification. This corporate inheritance is the issue of Christ's work as an Apostle superior to Moses and as a High Priest superior to Aaron.

#### ***The Work of Jesus as an Apostle Bringing Divinity into Humanity***

In Hebrews 3:1-6 Christ is revealed as an Apostle superior to Moses,<sup>12</sup> bringing God not only to man but also constituting God into man. The comparison in Hebrews between the work of Moses as an apostle and the work of Christ as the Apostle is not related to the giving of the law but rather to the building of God's house. As an Apostle, Jesus

was faithful to Him who constituted Him, as also Moses was in all His *house*. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by as much as He who built the *house* has more honor than the *house*. For every *house* is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses was faithful in all His *house* as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His *house*, whose *house* we are if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end. (vv. 2-6, emphasis added)

As an apostle, Moses was a faithful servant in all His house, but his work was only a testimony of the things to be spoken later (v. 5), things related to the believers' corporate deification as the house of God. The incarnation and constitution of divinity into the humanity of Jesus produced the material required for building God's house

(v. 2). In His humanity Christ is the "good material for God's building (the foundation stone—Isa. 28:16; the cornerstone—Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; the topstone—Zech. 4:7; and the living stone that produces us as living stones—1 Pet. 2:4-5)" (Recovery Version, Heb. 3:3, note 2). The building material of God's house is the sinless, perfected humanity of Jesus that enabled the divine attributes of God to be expressed through His human virtues in His human living. In His subsequent deification in resurrection, this uplifted humanity was imparted into the believers through their regeneration unto a living hope so that God could be manifested in the flesh through the church as His corporate expression (1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Tim. 3:16). The constitution of divinity into humanity also produced the Builder of God's house, the church, and as such a Builder in His humanity, Jesus is acknowledged as God (Heb. 3:4). Even though the church fulfills God's desire for a deified corporate expression, "He who built the house has more honor than the house" (v. 3). Although the phrase *more honor* surely indicates that the constituted humanity of Jesus has not only been deified but also exalted to the highest position through its incorporation into the Godhead, it also indicates that the believers, even as God's corporate, deified house, do not share in this same honor.

The references to the house of God in chapter 3, verses 2 through 6, whose house we are if we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end,<sup>13</sup> speak of the believers' corporate inheritance of salvation as deification. Only that which corresponds to God in life and nature can serve as His dwelling place. Although heaven is God's throne, and the earth is His footstool, the house that He desires to dwell in as a place of rest is being built with humanity and in humanity,<sup>14</sup> particularly in the enlivened and regenerated human spirit of the believers (Isa. 66:1). In His work as an Apostle superior to Moses, Jesus is building the church as the corporate dwelling place of God in our regenerated human spirit (Eph. 2:22).<sup>15</sup> In His incarnation as an Apostle, He was constituted with and manifested the perfected humanity that God needs as the building material for His dwelling place. In His humanity He was the dwelling place of God as the reality of the tabernacle and the temple (John 1:14; 2:19-21). In Him the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell bodily (Col. 1:19; 2:9). As an Apostle, Jesus accomplished the first step in the fulfillment of the promise of the believers' corporate inheritance of salvation by producing the material to build God's house in His perfected humanity and by building the church on the rock of the confession of His status as the Son of the living God in His humanity (Matt. 16:16-18).

#### ***The Work of Jesus as a High Priest Bringing Humanity into Divinity***

The fulfillment of the promise of the believers' corporate

inheritance of salvation, however, requires an additional step, a step involving the service and work of Jesus as a High Priest, which deifies the believers by bringing them into the house that has been built in order for them to dwell in God. This step was the focus of the Lord's prayer to the Father before His crucifixion and His subsequent deification in His humanity on the day of His resurrection. He prayed, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21). In order for us to be in God, God must first be in us, and the Lord's prayer in John 17 also covers this matter: "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me" (v. 23).

As a result of Jesus' work as an Apostle, our regenerated human spirit is life because of righteousness. This has established a righteous basis for God to indwell our regenerated human spirit and even to be one spirit with us (Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 6:17). Our regenerated human spirit matches God in life and nature, and the requirements of His righteousness, holiness, and glory have been fully satisfied; therefore, He can indwell our regenerated human spirit without any offense to His being. Whereas it is one thing for God to dwell in us, it is another thing for us to dwell in God because, even though we have been regenerated with the life of God in our spirit, our untransformed soul is still corrupt, and our body still responds to the indwelling sin in our flesh (Eph. 4:22; Rom. 7:18-20). Since the totality of our being does not match God in life and nature, we cannot bring what we are in its unmediated condition into God. Hebrews 12:14 affirms this point when it speaks of our need for sanctification in order to see the Lord. The entirety of our fallen condition must be mediated, and the sins that spring forth from our sinful nature must be propitiated in order for us to enter into God as our dwelling place, a dwelling place that Hebrews characterizes as the Holy of Holies (9:3-9, 12; 10:19, 22).

**I**n order to come forward to the Holy of Holies to dwell in God, our hearts must be sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies must be washed with pure water (10:22). "The body refers to our visible outward being, just as the heart refers to our invisible inward being. The pure water refers to the Lord's living word that cleanses our outward conduct and walk" (Recovery Version, v. 22, note 2). For the cleansing of our entire being, we need the intercession, the mediation, and propitiation of a High Priest, and in resurrection Jesus was made just such a High Priest so that He could carry out God's will to produce an enlarged corporate expression in which God and man mutually indwell one another in Christ (5:5-6; 10:7, 9).

**J**esus' work as a High Priest, which is covered in great detail in Hebrews 4:14 through 10:39, involves the impartation of His heavenly life as grace into us so that the divine life in our spirit can progressively sanctify us and fully qualify us to dwell in God and to be His corporate, deified house in this age and in the coming age (5:12-14; 6:1, 19; 8:10; 10:16-17, 39). His high priestly work is a work of ministering His humanized divinity and His divinized humanity into us so that we can be built up corporately as the house of God with God and the redeemed believers mutually indwelling each other in Christ. Jesus is identified as a great Priest over the house of God, a Minister of the true tabernacle (10:21), because all His work as a High Priest is being executed with a view to producing the house of God. As such, His work as a High Priest is focused on making man God in life and nature in order to produce a corporate, deified dwelling place for God and redeemed humanity. This is the chief point of the speaking of God in the Son in Hebrews (8:1-2).

In 4:14 through 7:28 Christ is revealed as a High Priest

**Jesus' work as a High Priest involves the impartation of His heavenly life as grace into us so that the divine life in our spirit can sanctify us and qualify us to dwell in God and to be His corporate, deified house in this age and in the coming age.**

superior to Aaron, bringing man not only to God but also bringing man into God by making the believers God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Through His high priestly service Christ is building God's house, God's deified corporate expression, by empowering the believers to come forward to the throne of grace in their spirit, which is the reality of the Holy of Holies (4:16).

The throne mentioned [in 4:16] is the throne of God, which is in heaven (Rev. 4:2). The throne of God is the throne of authority toward all the universe (Dan. 7:9; Rev. 5:1). But toward us, the believers, it becomes the throne of grace, signified by the expiation cover (the mercy seat) within the Holy of Holies (Exo. 25:17, 21). This throne is the throne of both God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). How can we come to the throne of God and the Lamb, Christ, in heaven while we still live on earth? The secret is our spirit, referred to in v. 12. The very Christ who is sitting on the throne in heaven (Rom. 8:34) is also now in us (Rom. 8:10), that is, in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), where the habitation of God is (Eph. 2:22). (Recovery Version, Heb. 4:16, note 1)

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As our High Priest, Christ is ministering His divine life as empowering grace (2 Tim. 2:1) in order to call us forward to the throne of grace where timely help can be continually supplied to us. By receiving the abundance of this grace, we will be brought on to maturity through our growth in the divine life (Heb. 5:14; 6:1). Without a continual supply of grace, however, it is easy to remain in the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God (5:12), to repeatedly lay a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God (6:1), and to fall away (v. 6). Without a continual supply of grace, it matters little that we once were enlightened, that we once tasted the heavenly gift, and that we once were partakers of the Holy Spirit and tasted the good word of God (vv. 4-5).

**I**n order to lay hold of the hope set before us, we cannot afford to be dull or sluggish in regard to coming forward to God in Christ and through Christ (vv. 18, 12; 7:25), who is our Forerunner, into the Holy of Holies (6:20). When Hebrews speaks of Jesus as our Forerunner, it signifies that our participation in the better things that belong to salvation results in our being made God in life and nature because this is the pattern that Christ established when He became a divine High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek in His humanity. Even though Jesus was made a High Priest in His humanity, the order of Melchizedek is a divine order. Chapter 7 is devoted to demonstrating the divinity of Jesus, who was deified in His humanity as a High Priest in order to bring the believers into the same process of deification. There is no genealogy for Melchizedek (v. 3); hence, Jesus belongs to a priestly order that is beyond the element of time, and thus He is divine. Even though He came after Aaron, Jesus is greater than Aaron because the order of His priesthood was pre-existent to Aaron, who was in the loins of Abraham when he made offerings to Melchizedek; hence, Jesus is beyond the element of mere humanity, and thus He is divine (vv. 4-11). His appointment as a High Priest is not according to a law of a fleshy commandment but according to the power of the indestructible life of God (v. 16); hence, He is beyond the constraints of human work and thus He is divine. Most importantly, the new covenant transfer to His divine priestly order has been accompanied with a transfer of law as well, a transfer from the law of letters to the law of life (v. 12). The Son, who has been perfected forever in His humanity (v. 28), whose priesthood is unalterable because of His deified status as a High Priest (v. 24), is now able to save us to the uttermost by enabling us to come forward to God through Him (v. 25). His ability to perfect the believers through His impartation of the divine life, which operates through the law of life, is further enhanced by His interceding prayers on our behalf, prayers that, no doubt, reflect His focused prayers in John 17 for our glorification, our entrance into the corporate inheritance of God's promise of deification (Heb. 2:10).

In chapters 8 through 10, Christ is further revealed as the Mediator of a new and better covenant, which contains the promise of our deification. Through His offering of Himself as a better sacrifice with better blood, Christ enacted a better covenant that perfects those who are being sanctified by imparting His laws into our mind and by inscribing them on our hearts. The operation of these laws in our being applies God's propitious grace and enables us to come forward to God in the Holy of Holies, our spirit, with a true heart in full assurance of faith. By entering into God, the reality of the Holy of Holies, through the new and living way initiated by Jesus as our High Priest, a corporate expression of deification is subsequently manifested in our incitement of one another to love and good works (10:24), in our assembling together (v. 25), in our willingness to be partakers with those who are being treated as a spectacle in reproaches and afflictions (v. 33), in our endurance in doing the will of God in order to obtain the promise (v. 36), and in our being those who have faith to the gaining of the soul, which is the proof of our salvation in the divine life (v. 39).

**I**n addition to presenting Jesus' work as a High Priest to enable us to come forward to the throne of grace, Hebrews 4:14—7:28 contains an extended speaking concerning Jesus' qualification and identification as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-11, 15, 17). Given His qualification for service, His function as a High Priest is the chief point that is unveiled in 8:1 through 10:39. This function is identified as the offering of "both gifts and sacrifices" (8:3). The gifts are for God's pleasure, whereas the sacrifices are for our sins (Recovery Version, 5:1, note 1). Under the old covenant some of the offerings were for God's satisfaction, and some were for the sins of the children of Israel. For example, the burnt offering was for God's satisfaction, and the sin and trespass offerings were for the sins of the children of Israel (Lev. 1:9; 4:2-3; 5:1-6). Although these offerings were related to the example and the shadow of the heavenly things (Heb. 8:5), including the tabernacle that Moses built according to the pattern that was shown to him in the mountain (v. 5), the sanctuary that was of this world (9:1), they cannot compare with the offerings that Jesus, as a Minister of the holy places, prepared in His body (10:5, 10). The gifts and the offerings of Jesus as our High Priest are the gifts and offerings of His being which brought Him into God in His deified humanity for God's satisfaction and which brings us into Him as the true tabernacle that the Lord pitched in Himself (9:14; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 8:2).

As our heavenly High Priest, Jesus, as the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings, has obtained a more excellent ministry that mediates a better covenant enacted upon better promises (v. 6). The better covenant is the

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new covenant ministry that carries out the better promises related to our deification by imparting God's laws into our mind and on our hearts, making God knowable to us in life according to His nature and making us a corporate people to Him, matching Him in His life and nature:

This is the covenant which I will covenant with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will impart My laws into their mind, and on their hearts I will inscribe them; and I will be God to them, and they will be a people to Me. (v. 10)

In Jeremiah 31:33,

the source of this quotation, the word used is *law* (singular), whereas in this verse it is *laws* (plural). This proves that it is one law that spreads to become a number of laws. This one law is the law of life (see *the law of the Spirit of life*—Rom. 8:2). Every life has a law. The higher the life, the higher is its law. The divine life that we receive of God is the highest life; therefore, it has the highest law, the law referred to here. By imparting His divine life into us, God puts this highest law into our spirit, whence it spreads into our inward parts, such as our mind, emotion, and will, and becomes several laws. (Recovery Version, 8:10, note 1)

The spreading of the divine life in our inward parts is an active and ongoing operation of the law of life that will bring us into the corporate inheritance of our salvation. This ongoing operation is illustrated by the sequential phrases *I will impart, I will inscribe, I will be God to them, and they will be a people to Me*. As believers, in this age the process of our deification is focused on the salvation of our soul (10:39). Consequently, it involves an ongoing cycle of deification that begins with the impartation of the divine life as the law of life from our spirit into our mind through enlightenment and revelation (Eph. 1:17-18). When the content of this revelation, Christ, is inscribed and deeply written into the constitution of our being, our heart (3:16-18), God becomes knowable to us as His divinity is humanized in us (4:20-21). At the same time, we become a people to Him with our humanity being divinized in His life and nature (1:23). This wonderful process is made possible by God's continuous propitiousness toward our unrighteousnesses and sins, based on His acceptance of the offerings of Jesus as our High Priest (Heb. 8:12).

**I**n His service as a High Priest, Jesus is imparting the divine life as the law of life into us for our perfection, our deification. This perfecting work, according to the promise of the new covenant, is the focus of chapters 9

and 10. These chapters present God's desire for our perfection primarily through the use of negative comparisons between the passing elements of the old covenant and the eternal elements of the new covenant. In the first eight verses of chapter 9, the tabernacle and its furnishings are described primarily to emphasize their usefulness in providing insight into the high priestly service that is needed to carry out God's New Testament economy (Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).<sup>16</sup> In Hebrews 9:9 the inadequacy of these figures to truly perfect, according to conscience, those who worship, is revealed. The blood of the old covenant sacrifices could not purify the conscience by taking away the sins of the people. At most, the blood of goats and bulls could cover their sins so that God could be propitious toward them by passing over their sins (Rom. 3:25). But the covering of sins and the passing over of sins involved only an objective appraisal of righteousness on God's part, based on His acceptance of the blood that was shed in His presence as a type of Christ. The actual and subjective taking away of sins, which is a necessary condition for the purification of our conscience and our perfection, however,

The promises related to our deification are carried out by God imparting His laws of life into our mind and on our hearts, making God knowable to us in life according to His nature and making us a corporate people to Him, matching Him in His life and nature.

could not occur until God sent His only begotten Son to be the Lamb of God in order to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). With the one offering of Jesus with His better blood, however, those who are being sanctified have been perfected forever (10:14).

**C**hapter 10 further negatively compares the sacrifices that were offered year by year under the law and which could never remove sins with the one sacrifice for sins offered to God through the service of Jesus as a High Priest. This comparison, however, is not made in order to prove the superiority of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ under the new covenant; this fact is assumed, because it is proved in chapter 9. Rather, the comparison is made to show the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice in carrying out the ongoing accomplishment of the will of God (10:7-9), which is the perfection of those who are being sanctified (v. 14), that is, the deification of those who are the beneficiaries of Jesus' offering up of His body once for all (v. 10). The one offering of Jesus Christ has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Even though "Christ has already perfected and completed us through

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His one offering” (Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1), the perfected ones also are identified as “those who are being sanctified.” This is not a contradiction but an acknowledgment that the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will cannot be frustrated (Eph. 1:11), that what God promised will be worked out in time. Hebrews 10:16, subsequently, reaffirms that our sanctification is being worked out by the impartation of the law of life into our hearts and mind: “This is the covenant which I will covenant with them after those days, says the Lord: I will impart My laws upon their hearts, and upon their mind I will inscribe them.” With His better covenant of better promises with a more excellent ministry and with His better sacrifices and better blood with the greater and more perfect tabernacle, Jesus is now functioning in His qualified capacity as a deified High Priest according to the divine order of Melchizedek to bring us into the corporate inheritance of God’s promise of deification. This is the great reward that we are the beneficiaries of and that we may obtain if we endure and do not cast away our boldness (vv. 35-36).

### **The Application of the Promise of Deification through the Speaking of the Son as the Spirit**

The benefits of Jesus’ work as an Apostle superior to Moses, which brings God into humanity for the building up of His house, and His work as a High Priest superior to Aaron, which brings humanity into God for the expression of His enlarged house, are applied through the speaking of God in the Son as the Spirit in our spirit. These benefits are conveyed through the announcement of the good news that produces faith, which profits us by bringing us into the promise of our inheritance (4:2; 6:12). The faith that comes from hearing the word of God is the faith that is needed for the gaining of our soul (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 10:39). The emphasis on faith throughout Hebrews, but especially in chapter 11, underscores the importance of God’s speaking in the Son. Hebrews begins by referencing God’s speaking in 1:1-2, saying, “God, having spoken of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son,” and it ends by identifying the speaking of the Son as “the word of this exhortation” (13:22).

**I**n many respects Hebrews is an exhortation related to the believers’ deification, and in order to participate in the new covenant process of deification, the speaking of the Son is critical, and our hearing of the Lord’s voice is equally critical. This is because faith is produced and grace is imparted when we hear God’s speaking. Given the connection between the word of God and faith, we need to realize that the living and operative word of God is the means for our deification in the economy of God (4:12).<sup>17</sup> Since exhortations typically include warnings,

Hebrews contains five warnings, each of which are embedded within a larger section that speaks of an aspect of the superiority of Christ in God’s New Testament economy. In each of these five warnings, our need to hear and receive the word of God is emphasized, whether this speaking is from the Son, through the ministry of the apostles, or in the Body.

**I**n the first warning in 2:1-4, we are charged to give heed more abundantly to the things that we have heard from the Lord and from the apostles (vv. 1, 3). To not heed this warning opens a way for us to drift away and to receive a just recompense for neglecting the salvation spoken of by the Lord and confirmed by the apostles (vv. 1-3). In the second warning in 3:7—4:13, we are charged to not harden our hearts when we hear the voice of the Lord (3:7-8, 15; 4:7), to value the speaking of the Son through our exhortation of the brothers related to the things that we have been assured of (3:13), and to mix the words that we have heard with faith by allowing the living and operative word to divide soul and spirit and to discern the thoughts and intentions of our heart (4:2, 12). To not heed this warning tests the Lord and causes us to fall away from the living God (3:9-12). It also results in unbelief and disobedience, which deprive us of our opportunity to enter into God’s rest in this age and in the coming age (vv. 18-19; 4:3). In the third warning in 5:11—6:20, we are charged to not be dull of hearing (5:11), to advance beyond the word of the beginning of Christ in order to be brought on to maturity (6:1), to be experienced in the word of righteousness (5:13), and to focus on the better things that belong to salvation, which have been presented in the speaking of the apostles (6:9). To not heed this warning is to place ourselves at risk of being disapproved and near a curse (v. 8). In the fourth warning in 10:19-39, we are charged to hold fast the confession of our hope and to incite one another to love and good works in our speaking to one another and in assembling together (vv. 23-25), which give us great boldness for the gaining of our reward. To not heed this warning creates a certain fearful expectation of judgment by trampling underfoot the Son of God and insulting the Spirit of grace (vv. 27, 29), which nullify our faith and cause us to shrink back to ruin (v. 39). In the fifth warning in 12:1-29, we are charged to remember the exhortation that our discipline is related to our status as sons (v. 5), to receive the Father’s discipline that comes with His words of reproof (v. 5), and to not refuse Him who speaks and warns from heaven (v. 25). To not heed this warning is to fall away from the grace of God and to fail to come forward to Mount Zion, which is the expression of the reality of our deification as the dwelling place of God in this age and in the coming age (vv. 15, 22).

Although there is no escape of judgment for those who

turn away from Him who warns from heaven (v. 25), we can run with endurance the race related to the fulfillment of God's promise of our deification (v. 1) by opening ourselves to the living and operative word of God, which produces faith in our being. And by so running, the pattern that was authored in the person and work of Jesus as an Apostle and High Priest will be inscribed into our being and built up in our being to produce a corporate dwelling place for God and redeemed humanity, as Mount Zion in this age and in the next and as the New Jerusalem in eternity.

## Conclusion

Hebrews is a book concerning the promise of deification, a book on God being made man in order to make man God. It unveils the authoring of the fulfillment of this promise in the person and through the work of Christ, and then it assures us of our inheritance of this promise through the authoring work of Jesus on our behalf as an Apostle and High Priest. His work brings God into humanity once again through our regeneration in the divine life, and His work brings humanity into God once again through the operation of the law of the divine life that has been imparted into our mind and inscribed into our hearts as grace through His speaking. This is the confession that we need to consider and hold fast, and as our considerations are mixed with faith, we will be brought into the corporate fulfillment of our promised inheritance, our deification. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is significant that Hebrews, which is addressed to genuine believers, nevertheless, speaks of these believers as "those who are to inherit salvation" (1:14). This is a strong indication that salvation in Hebrews encompasses more than the traditional understanding of the term *salvation*, which associates salvation merely with the forgiveness of sins that has been made possible by the redemptive death of Christ on the cross and which was received when we repented of our sins and confessed Jesus as Lord with our mouth, believing in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). This traditional understanding is not an unreasonable understanding of *salvation*, because Hebrews does speak of Christ "having made purification of sins" (1:3), of Christ "having been offered once to bear the sins of many" (9:28), and of Christ "having offered one sacrifice for sins" (10:12). This understanding, however, is inadequate; of the fifteen references to *sins* in Hebrews, only these three directly refer to Christ's redemptive act in time. The remaining references speak of sins exclusively in relation to Christ's continuing operation, as our great High Priest in resurrection and ascension, to impart His person and work into us for our perfection unto a coming salvation.

In addition to 1:3; 9:28; and 10:12, the word *sins* appears twelve more times in 2:17; 5:1, 3; 7:27; 8:12; 9:7; 10:2-4, 11, 17, and 26. All these references to *sins* are presented in the context of Christ's person and work as our resurrected and ascended High Priest rather than to His person and work as our redeeming Savior. The context of each verse involves either a contrast between Christ's high priestly work in the new covenant with the service of the high priests under the old covenant (5:1; 7:27; 9:7; 10:2-4, 11, 26) or a description of the operation of Christ's high priestly work in the new covenant (2:17; 5:3; 8:12; 10:17), following our redemption and regeneration.

It should also be noted that even though the references to sins in 1:3; 9:28; and 10:12 allude to the redemptive act of Christ on the cross, they are presented within the context of Christ's heavenly ministry as our great High Priest: after speaking of Christ having made purification of sins, verse 3 of chapter 1 speaks of Christ in His ascension, saying, Christ "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"; after speaking of Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, verse 28 of chapter 9 speaks of Christ in His ascension, saying, He "will

The benefits of Jesus' work as an Apostle, which brings God into humanity for the building up of His house, and as a High Priest, which brings humanity into God for the expression of His house, are applied through the speaking of God in the Son as the Spirit in our spirit.

appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him"; and after speaking of Christ having offered one sacrifice for sins, verse 12 of chapter 10 speaks of Christ in His ascension, saying, He "sat down forever on the right hand of God."

In contrast to the traditional view that Hebrews emphasizes Christ's superior work of redemption, Hebrews is concerned more with the sins that continue to encumber us from running the race, each of which can become an entangling sin that hinders us from being perfected unto salvation (12:1; 9:28). Therefore, when Hebrews speaks of salvation, it is speaking of the deified aspect of our full salvation that we will inherit as glorified sons, not just of the redemptive aspect which we have already received.

<sup>2</sup>It is instructive to note that among Orthodox Christians, the term *salvation* connotes this expansive understanding. In the index to Jaroslav Pelikan's first volume of his series *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, the entry for *salvation* contains a subheading, "defined as: deification" (392).

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<sup>3</sup>Those who are vehement in their opposition to deification often associate this teaching with the self-exalting, boastful words of Satan as the Daystar in Isaiah 14:13-14: "You said in your heart: / I will ascend to heaven; / Above the stars of God / I will exalt my throne. / ...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; / I will make myself like the Most High." Although it may seem as if a more expansive understanding of salvation as deification in the economy of God overreaches by grasping for a position that is reserved for the Most High alone, this comparison falls short and, in fact, is an ironic condemnation of the counsel of the detractors of deification. First, the teaching that God became man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead explicitly acknowledges the supremacy of the authority of the Godhead, the throne of God. Therefore, there is no hint of self-exaltation or support for the notion that the incommunicable aspects of the Triune God can be grasped in this statement. Second, deification is not a challenge to God because it is sourced in God. It is God who willingly became man, according to His ordained plan, and it is God who highly exalted the man Jesus in His resurrection, making Him divine in His humanity as the Lord to whom every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:6-11).

Satan's boast revolves around self-motivated and self-initiated actions in opposition to God—"I will ascend," "I will exalt," and "I will make myself." The teaching of deification, properly understood and explained, only confirms the desire and will of God. Deification is not a work of man but of God; it is truly a matter that is out from Him and through Him and to Him for His glory in His enlarged expression (Rom. 11:36). To equate God's desire with Satan's boast is to side with Satan in his efforts to frustrate the fulfillment of God's economy. This frustration occurs at several levels. First, a rejection of deification as the goal of salvation requires that another understanding of God's work, a more limited understanding, be posited as the goal of salvation. This is an affront to the truth of God. Second, a rejection of deification as the goal of salvation limits the scope of God's work in us, as believers, because in the divine economy we are able to enter only into what we see (John 3:3; Eph. 1:18). If our understanding of salvation is limited to redemption, for example, we will benefit from the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, but we will not be brought on to maturity (Heb. 5:12; 6:1). This is an affront to the experience of God. An assertion of equivalence between Satan's overreaching and the teaching of deification elevates a limited understanding of the confession of our faith above that which God has planned and purposed in Himself, and it holds down the truth in unrighteousness (Eph. 1:9; Rom. 1:18). Therefore, a rejection of deification is, in reality, an ironic assumption of a position of authority and counsel that is above God Himself (Rom. 11:34). This stirs the wrath of God because such counsel only darkens the believers' understanding and experience of God's great salvation with words that are without knowledge (1:18; Heb. 3:7-12; 4:2-3; Job 38:2).

<sup>4</sup>When we speak of deification, the sequence of the wording

in the statement *God became man in order to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead* initially lays stress on the incarnation, that is, on the matter of God being made man. But this is not the sequence that is stressed in Hebrews, which pre-eminently focuses on the second step in the process of deification, that of the believers' being made God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, based on the historical qualifications of Christ's incarnation and redemption. This reversal of sequence and stress can be seen in verse 2 of chapter 1, which speaks first of the deification of the humanity of Jesus as the appointed Heir of all things and then of the possibility of God being made man based on the creation of the universe, including humanity. Verse 4 of the same chapter speaks of the deification of Jesus, who has become much better than the angels, through His inheritance of a more distinguished name. Only after the deification of Jesus in His humanity has been asserted and proclaimed in verse 4, however, does the writer of Hebrews refer to the process of God being made man, of God being made a little inferior to the angels by becoming a genuine man (2:7, 9). This sequential difference, I think, is related to the fact that of the two operations of the Triune God in the fulfillment of His promise of deification, the first operation, that of God being made man, has been accomplished by Christ and has even been eternally applied to the believers through the redemption of Christ. The second operation, however, that of man being made God, has been accomplished in full only in Christ. Consequently, the believers still must pass through this step in the process of deification, which makes the becoming of God in life and nature but not the Godhead the crucial focus of the revelation presented in Hebrews.

<sup>5</sup>Needless to say, such a neglect is practically assured if we do not see or hold fast to the confession that salvation in Hebrews is synonymous with deification.

<sup>6</sup>Throughout Hebrews there are recurring references to creation, including the making of the universe (1:2), the coming again of the Firstborn into the inhabited earth (v. 6), the laying of the foundation of the earth and the works of the heavens (v. 10), the coming inhabited earth (2:5), the setting of Christ over the works of God's hands and the subjecting of all things to Him (vv. 7-8), the works of creation which were completed from the foundation of the world (4:3), the coming of Christ into the world to do the will of God (10:5-9), and the shaking of the earth and heaven related to the establishment of an unshakable kingdom (12:26). These references, I believe, underscore the importance of the creation in God's desire and plan to be enlarged in life and nature through His economic operation of making man God, an operation that could occur only outside the eternal realm of His immanent being and therefore necessitated the creative act of making man so that in turn God could carry out the initial step of deification in His economy, that of being made man.

<sup>7</sup>It is not too much to say that deification is the will of God. If this process originates with God, it must be sourced in His will and reflect His will. This is supported by verses 7 through

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10 of chapter 10, which speak of God becoming a man in order to carry out the will of God.

“Then I said, Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written concerning Me) to do Your will, O God.” Saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not desire nor delight in” (which are offered according to the law), He then has said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second, by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

If the establishment of a true sacrifice was according to the will of God (v. 9), the coming of God into humanity, which made this one sacrifice for sin possible (v. 12), certainly must also be a matter of the will of God. According to verse 10, the establishment of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross according to the will of God is for the believers’ subsequent sanctification, indicating that our sanctification, which involves the divinization of our humanity as it is expressed through our soul, is also a matter of the will of God. These verses indicate that deification is the will of God because the Son came to do the will of God by becoming a sacrifice for sin so that redeemed humanity could be made God in life and nature through the sanctifying work of the Spirit of grace (vv. 14, 29).

<sup>8</sup>The corporate aspect of the deification of the believers, who are the organic enlargement of Christ in life and nature as the seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise, is also unveiled in Galatians 3:29. This matter is covered in more detail in “The Organic Gospel in Galatians” in the July 1996 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, pages 44 through 47.

<sup>9</sup>The reversal of the sequence in the process of deification in Hebrews 1:3 follows the same sequence as in verse 4; that is, the deification of the humanity of Jesus in resurrection is stressed prior to a reference to the Son’s incarnation in humanity, which is implied by the phrase *having made purification of sins*. This is a further indication that the emphasis in Hebrews is on the believers’ being brought on to maturity, a process which has a base in the purification of our sins but which requires a willingness to be led into glory.

<sup>10</sup>To make Jesus perfect was to make Him perfect in terms of qualification. It does not imply that there was any imperfection of virtue or attribute in Jesus, but only that the completing of His experience of human sufferings was needed to make Him fit to become the Author, the Leader, of His followers’ salvation.

As the self-existing and ever-existing God, the Lord Jesus is complete from eternity to eternity. But He needed to be perfected through the processes of incarnation, the partaking of human nature, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, that He might

be qualified to be God’s Christ and our Savior. (Recovery Version, 2:10, note 5)

<sup>11</sup>When Hebrews begins to speak of the work of Christ as the Author of salvation, His work as a High Priest, which corresponds to the step in the process of deification that involves man being made God, is mentioned in 2:17 before His work as an Apostle, which corresponds to the step in the process of deification that involves God being made man, is unveiled in 3:1. And although He is identified as an Apostle before He is identified as a High Priest in 3:1—“consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”—His work as an Apostle is the focus of only the following five verses. His work as a High Priest, in contrast, is the focus of Hebrews 4:14 through 10:39. The initial reference to Christ as a High Priest in 2:17 and the dramatic imbalance in the emphasis in Hebrews on the work of Christ as a High Priest underscore the reversal of the sequence of the process of deification that is stressed in Hebrews. See notes 4 and 9 above. This is a further confirmation that the focus of Hebrews is on the work of God to make man God in life and nature as His heirs, having accomplished the purification of our sins through His incarnation and through the offering

**Deification is sourced in God. It is God who willingly became man, and it is God who highly exalted the man Jesus in His resurrection, making Him divine in His humanity as the Lord to whom every knee shall bow.**

up of His body on the tree for our sins (1 Pet. 2:24). In many respects, God has accomplished the first step of the process of deification; thus, His interest and focus are on the step that has yet to be accomplished in the believers’ experience.

This book is focused on the heavenly Christ, and the chief point concerning this Christ is that He is a Priest not according to the order of Aaron but according to the order of Melchizedek. All the other aspects of Christ in the foregoing chapters, such as His being the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Author of salvation, the Apostle, and the real Joshua, are the necessary qualifications for Him to be such a Priest, a Priest who can minister to us whatever we need and save us to the uttermost. (Recovery Version, Heb. 7:11, note 1)

<sup>12</sup>The section in Hebrews that unveils the superiority of Christ as an Apostle worthy of more glory and honor than Moses begins in 3:1 and extends to 4:13. Whereas the work of Christ is covered in chapter 3, verses 1 through 6, the remaining verses present a warning related to not coming short of the promised rest that is a reward for the people of God, those who

allow the words of the Apostle to operate in their being (4:12) to produce faith for their profit and growth in life (v. 2) and diligence in order to not fall after the same example of the children of Israel's disobedience (v. 11). The provocation of the children of Israel in the day of trial in the wilderness illustrates the general tendency of all humanity toward disobedience (3:8). But, even more, it illustrates the tendency toward disobedience in believers whose spirit has not been divided from their soul by the living word of God that is being spoken today by Christ in His work as an Apostle sent by God to impart the living and operative word of God into us for our deification.

<sup>13</sup>It may seem contradictory for Hebrews to speak of a promise of an eternal inheritance that reflects God's unchangeable counsel (9:15; 6:17), while at the same time, warning us to not come short of God's promised rest (4:1). If Christ is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (12:2), how is it possible for such a promise to be left unanswered and for a believer to come short of it? This shortage seems as if it is more of an indictment of Christ's work to bring us into glory rather than a cause for warning and discipline. Such a thought, however, comes from an evil heart of unbelief (3:12), a heart which, having been hardened to the voice of the Lord (v. 15; 4:7), has no discernment and is incapable of discriminating between good, the superior content of God's promised inheritance, and evil, the dead works that are rooted in a conscience that is lacking the application of the purifying blood of Christ (v. 12; 5:14; 9:14).

This seeming contradiction is not a contradiction at all because Hebrews speaks not only of the ultimate consummation of our corporate deification as the city of God, the enlarged house of God, the New Jerusalem, but it also speaks of an enjoyment of this corporate deification in the coming kingdom as a contingent reward for our participation in and our obtaining of a good testimony of God's salvation through our faith in this age.

The promise of the eternal inheritance is based on Christ's eternal redemption, not on our work, and is different from the promise in 10:36, which is conditioned on our endurance and our doing the will of God...The eternal inheritance in the promise here is through the eternal redemption of Christ, whereas the great reward (10:35) in the promise in 10:36 is given by virtue of our endurance and our doing the will of God. (Recovery Version, 9:15, note 2)

The promise that is obtained only through endurance and doing the will of God in this age is

the promise of the Sabbath rest mentioned in 4:9, a rest in which we will reign with Christ in the coming kingdom. That will be the great reward mentioned in v. 35, which is the gaining of the soul mentioned in v. 39. This promise is conditioned on our endurance and our doing the will of God. It differs from the promise in 9:15. (Recovery Version, 10:36, note 2)

<sup>14</sup>The promise of our corporate inheritance as the people of God is fulfilled in the building up of the house of God, which is the reality of the Sabbath rest (Heb. 3:11; 4:3, 5, 9-11).

When Christ's work of building the house of God is consummated, God will rest from His work (4:10). We should be diligent to enter into this rest as a foretaste in this age so that we can enter into His rest in the coming kingdom (v. 11).

<sup>15</sup>Since every person possesses a human spirit by virtue of God's creation (Gen. 2:7; Zech. 12:1), it is easy to assume that the human spirit of a person is, so to speak, his unique possession that is separate and distinct from others. While this may be the case with unbelievers, who have a deadened spirit that is incapable of true fellowship with God because of their alienation from the life of God (Eph. 4:18), the human spirit of every believer has been enlivened with the life of God, and hence, there is fellowship of spirit in one spirit with Christ and with those who have been made alive together with Him (Phil. 2:1; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:5). The regenerated human spirit of a believer is a corporate spirit that is being built up as a dwelling place of God, together with others, not individually.

<sup>16</sup>It is truly regrettable that these insights could not be included in Hebrews due to a lack of time to speak of them in detail (9:5). This may also be due to a shortage on the part of the Hebrew believers to whom there was much to say that was also difficult to interpret because they were dull of hearing.

<sup>17</sup>The living and operative word of God, which contains the speaking of the Son that produces faith, is the biblical means for the believers' deification. This differs from the outward means of deification offered by Orthodox Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church, which link the process of deification with participation in the "sacraments," including the Eucharist, baptism, chrismation, confession, and marriage. In *The Orthodox Church*, Timothy Ware confirms this view, stating, "Church and sacraments are the means appointed by God whereby we may acquire the sanctifying Spirit and be transformed into the divine likeness" (238). It is ironic that for many in Christianity who accept the teaching of deification, the fulfillment of this promise is associated with outward practices that, like the practices under the old covenant, do not intrinsically contain the operative element of the divine life, even though they may be examples and shadows of the heavenly things (8:5). To return to sacramental elements that, in principle, mirror the role of the sacramental offerings under the old covenant is, in many respects, to trample underfoot the person and work of the Son of God and to insult the Spirit of grace (10:29).

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