

Romans in Light of the Vital Factors for the Fulfillment of God's Eternal Purpose

by Ron Kangas

As many students of the New Testament realize, the book of Romans is a summary of the Christian life and the church life, an overall view of the personal and corporate experience of Christ according to the gospel of God concerning His Son. The central thought of this Epistle is that God, in His sovereign mercy and in keeping with His eternal predestination, is operating, through the gospel, to make sinners sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ, which is expressed as local churches. This operation involves several exceedingly crucial matters: selection, condemnation, calling, justification, sanctification, renewing, transformation, glorification, consecration for the Body of Christ, the proper receiving of the believers according to God and Christ, and the practice of the genuine church life in the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ unto the glory of the only wise God.

Romans, therefore, presents essential truths related to our believing into Christ and being justified by God in His grace; to our experience and enjoyment of Christ as those who have been baptized into Him, who are being saved in His life, who are walking in newness of life, and who are living, walking, and serving in spirit in order to be led by the Spirit; and to our living of the Body life according to its basic principles in light of the requirement of giving an account at the judgment seat of God. The theological and spiritual exploration of these truths is, understandably, endless, since we are dealing with "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God," whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are untraceable (11:33).

This short essay is an effort to contribute to the believers' appreciation of Romans by viewing this Epistle in the light of four vital factors for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose—the divine economy, the divine dispensing, the organic union with Christ, and the corporate expression of the Triune God.

The Divine Economy

Although the words *divine economy* are not used in Romans, the fact remains that this book is rich in its unveiling of God's economy, which is His plan, according to the good pleasure of His will, to fulfill His eternal purpose by dispensing Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated tripartite elect. At least four aspects of the revelation in this Epistle point in this direction and thereby present the divine economy in reality if not in terminology.

The Will of God, the Purpose of God, the Grace of God, and the Revelation of the Mystery

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." The will of God here is not God's will regarding minor matters, such as one's future marriage or profession, but God's great, eternal, determined will mentioned in Revelation 4:11 and in Ephesians 1:5, 9, and 11. In Revelation 4:11 the veil is removed for us to see that God created all things because of His will, indicating that the universe and everything and everyone in it exist because of God's will, and this will, ultimately, as the book of Revelation makes clear, is to have the New Jerusalem composed of glorified sons of God so that, for eternity, the redeeming God may enjoy a married life with His wife, the holy city, a corporate God-man. According to Ephesians 1, with God's eternal will there is His good pleasure—that which delights Him and satisfies His need for enjoyment (v. 5). According to this good pleasure, God has made known to the apostles the mystery of His will (v. 9), and He is working all things according to the counsel of His will (v. 11). The will of God, therefore, implies the economy of God.

In Romans Paul speaks twice concerning God's purpose. In 8:28 the purpose of God is related to "all things." "We know," Paul assures us, "that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." In 9:11 God's purpose is related to His eternal selection, His sovereign choice made in eternity past, and to His calling in time through the announcing of the gospel: "that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works but of Him who calls." The purpose for which we were selected and called is revealed in 8:29: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers."

The purpose in verse 28 is essentially connected to the image, the Firstborn, and the brothers in verse 29. As we all know, humankind was created in the image of God, which image is Christ Himself (Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15). The image of God is the expression of God. For Christ to be the image of God is for Him to be the personal expression of God in the Godhead; for the believers to bear the image

brothers—those who have been born of God and who are the same as the Son of God in life and nature but not in the unique Godhead—must not only be transformed into the same image—the image of the resurrected Christ—but also be conformed to the image of God's Son.

God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He, the Son, might be the Firstborn among many brothers. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ as God's firstborn Son in order that we may be a group of God-men who are exactly the same as the Firstborn in every possible way. We may say that the Firstborn is the prototype and that the many brothers are the reproduction of the prototype. Through conformation we become the mass reproduction of God's firstborn Son, and in this way God will obtain a corporate expression of Himself in and with the firstborn Son and the many sons for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. This surely involves God's economy, the divine plan and arrangement whereby God's purpose is carried out.

"You are not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

This word indicates that through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God, a transfer of tremendous significance has taken place—a transfer from the Old Testament economy of law to the New Testament economy of grace. When the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, He was full of grace (John 1:14), and now we may all receive grace upon grace (v. 16). "For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ" (v. 17).

The will of God, the purpose of God, the grace of God, and the revelation of the mystery—all of which are found in the book of Romans—all indicate that the divine economy is a vital factor for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

of God is for them to be the corporate expression of God in the divine economy. Presently, the children of God—having been born of God, regenerated, in their spirit—are undergoing the process of transformation in their soul (2 Cor. 3:18). Eventually, transformation issues in conformation, which is higher than transformation. Whereas transformation is inward and is a matter of essence, conformation is outward and is a matter of shape. Transformation involves a metabolic change in form, but conformation involves the shaping of this form into a certain image—the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God.

In the Godhead Christ, in His eternal and absolute deity, is, was, and always will be the unique only begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). As such, He cannot have and does not have brothers, for this would jeopardize His standing as the only begotten Son in the Godhead. In God's economy, however, Christ, the Son of God, in and with His glorified, uplifted, and deified humanity, has become the firstborn Son. As such, He has many brothers, who were regenerated through His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; John 20:17; Heb. 2:10-12). These

Paul had been exceedingly zealous for the law and had advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries (Gal. 1:14), but one day the resurrected Christ appeared to him, and God called him through His grace (v. 15) and appointed him to the ministry to testify of "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). For Paul, this grace, which is actually the Triune God Himself (and not merely the unmerited favor of God), was everything, giving him a new identity in Christ and enabling him to labor abundantly for the fulfillment of God's purpose. "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Central to the proper understanding of grace in the Epistle to the Romans is the realization that in this book, as in Acts (which documents the dispensational transfer) the word *grace* has a dispensational, or economical, significance, for to be no longer under law but under grace is to be in God's New Testament economy. Hence, the frequent mention of grace in Romans points us to the divine economy unfolded by Paul.

Although it is a doctrinal commonplace to emphasize the theme of grace in Romans, theologians and exegetes may not pay adequate attention to the relationship between grace and the divine economy in this book. In 1:3-4 Paul speaks of the Son, “who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Then in verse 5 he goes on to say, “Through whom we have received grace and apostleship unto the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name.” The revelation in verses 3 and 4 is focused on the Son not mainly in the Godhead but primarily in God’s economy, and thus for grace to come through Jesus Christ our Lord means that grace is received through the resurrected Christ according to the divine economy. Having received this grace, Paul could later declare, “If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you” (Eph. 3:2). The fact that in the New Testament *economy* and *stewardship* are translations of the same Greek word (*oikonomia*), the economy of God, the grace of God, and the stewardship of the grace of God are inextricably bound together and, like the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead, are distinct but not separate.

Numerous verses in Romans associate the grace of God with the economy of God, including the complete salvation of God with judicial redemption and salvation in life (5:10). Although we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:23), we have been “justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24). Through our Lord Jesus Christ “we have obtained access...into this grace in which we stand” (5:1-2). We are not only under grace but in the realm of grace, where grace is everything to us, gives everything to us, and does everything for us. Because this grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (v. 21), “those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (v. 17). In the practice of the Body life in the church life, Paul could speak “through the grace given” to him and then help the believers to realize they have “gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (12:3, 6). Finally, just as toward the beginning of his Epistle, Paul blessed his readers with grace (1:7), he blessed them with grace as he was nearing the end: “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you” (16:20). This is the grace of God in the economy operating in Paul and in us all.

Romans 16:25-26 speak of the revelation of the mystery:

To Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages but has now been manifested.

The mystery in verse 25 refers to “the economy of the

mystery...which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (Eph. 3:9). Paul testified that grace had been given to him to enlighten others so that they might see what the economy of the mystery is. Hence, mystery and economy are intrinsically related; where there is the mystery, there is the economy, and where there is the economy, there is the mystery. Paul’s use of the word *mystery* in Romans 16:25 definitely refers to the divine economy, which is of the divine mystery.

In eternity God planned a will, but it was a mystery hidden in Him; thus, it was a mystery—the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9; Rev. 4:11). As Ephesians 3:9-11 makes evident, the church is the hidden mystery in God’s eternal economy. The mystery of the universe is God, the mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4). The eternal economy of God is of God’s eternal purpose, God’s determined intent. According to Ephesians 3:4, the church has a particular title—*the mystery of Christ*. In God’s economy revealed in the New Testament, there are two main mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God, that is, God embodied in Christ, God defined in Christ, God explained in Christ, God expressed in Christ, and God made visible in Christ (2:2). The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ (v. 4). Together, Christ and the church are the great mystery (5:32). This great mystery is the meaning of the universe and of human life.

Related to the church as the mystery of Christ there is the economy of the mystery (3:9). God’s economy is His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen people so that He may have the church, the Body of Christ, to be His corporate expression. For this reason, there is the economy of the mystery.

God’s hidden purpose is the mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery is revelation, the lifting of the veil; therefore, Paul speaks of the revelation of the mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3). The mystery of Christ, the church, was hidden in other generations but has been revealed in the New Testament age (v. 5). Although this mystery was hidden in God throughout the ages, the New Testament believers, if they are enlightened (1:17-18; 3:9), are able to see it. God’s hidden purpose is the mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery in the mingled spirit in Ephesians 3:5 is the revelation of the mystery mentioned in Romans 16:25.

The will of God, the purpose of God, the grace of God, and the revelation of the mystery hidden in God—all these are found in the book of Romans, all are intimately related to the divine economy, and all are indications that in the book of Romans the divine economy surely is a vital factor for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose.

The Divine Dispensing

The divine economy is accomplished by the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3-23; 3:14-21). The divine economy is God's plan and arrangement issuing out from His will, desire, purpose, and counsel; the divine dispensing is God's dispensing and distributing according to this plan and arrangement.

It is no exaggeration to say that what is revealed in the New Testament concerning God is related to the divine dispensing for the divine economy (Rom. 8:3, 11; Eph. 1:3-23). If we are willing to divest ourselves of traditional, objective theological notions and reconsider the totality of the divine revelation of the Divine Trinity in the New Testament and if we are willing to come to the Lord to be enlightened by Him, we will see that the revelation concerning the Triune God in the Scriptures is not mainly for doctrinal understanding but primarily for the dispensing of God in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people for their experience and enjoyment of Him so that, in Christ and in the mingled spirit,

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they may carry out His economy for the fulfillment of His purpose.

This is precisely what is unveiled regarding the Triune God in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Romans reveals God in creation (1:19-20), God in condemnation (v. 18; 2:2-3, 16; 1:32; 3:19), God in redemption (vv. 22, 24; 4:25; 5:6, 8), God in justification (3:24, 26; 4:25; 5:1), God in reconciliation (vv. 10-11), God in identification (6:3-5), God in sanctification (vv. 4, 19, 22-23), God in glorification (8:21, 23, 28-30), God in His love (vv. 31-39), God in His selection (9:11, 15-16, 21, 23; 11:5), God in the Body life (12:1-6, 11; 14:1-6, 18-19, 23; 15:7), and God in the church life (vv. 5, 13; 16:1-2, 5, 16, 20, 23). With this as the background, we can now appreciate the revelation in Romans of God in the divine dispensing, that is, God in His economical Trinity operating to impart Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers to be life to their tripartite being. This revelation is presented in a remarkable and wonderful way in Romans 8.

Although the word *dispensing* is not used in chapter 8, or

elsewhere in Romans, the fact of the divine dispensing is nonetheless found in this chapter. This fact is indicated by the word *give* in verse 11. "If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." To give is to dispense. This dispensing, this giving of life, involves the Triune God in His economy, the divine life, and the believers' tripartite being.

Romans 8 is rich and profound in its revelation of the Triune God for our experience and enjoyment. God the Father sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin in order to condemn sin in the flesh (v. 3). The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God the Father, born of Him in spirit to have His life and nature (v. 16). As children of God, we have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, "Abba, Father!" (v. 15). In eternity past God the Father foreknew us and predestinated us (v. 29). "And those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (v. 30).

Because we have believed into Christ, the Son of God, and have been baptized into Him (6:3-5), we are in Christ Jesus, where there is no condemnation (8:1) and in whom we are freed from the law of sin and of death (v. 2). Furthermore, because Christ is in us, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness (v. 10). The sons of God are joint heirs with Christ and expect to be glorified with Him (v. 17). Christ, the First-born among many brothers, is the One to whose image we are being conformed for God's corporate expression (v. 29). While this process is taking place, Christ Jesus, who dwells in us (v. 10), is at the right hand of God interceding for us (v. 34). According to Paul's reassuring word, while all things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose, nothing will separate us from the love of Christ, from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 28, 35, 39).

Romans 8 is profound especially in what it says concerning the Spirit. In verse 2 the Spirit is called the Spirit of life with its liberating law. Verse 9 speaks of the Spirit of God dwelling in us and of the believers having the Spirit of Christ, indicating thereby that, in the divine economy for the divine dispensing, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. As Paul says in verse 11—a verse that refers to the three of the Divine Trinity—if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, makes home in us, the One who raised Christ from the dead will impart life to our mortal bodies through this

indwelling Spirit. Verse 14 tells us that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God, and verse 16 says that the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. Although we are awaiting full sonship, with the redemption of our bodies, we may experience the firstfruits of the Spirit (v. 23). Moreover, because we do not know what to pray for as is fitting, the Spirit joins in to help us in our weakness and then intercedes for us according to God (vv. 26-27).

Contrary to what is supposed by certain systematic theologians and philosophical apologists, the revelation of the Divine Trinity in Romans 8 is given not for theological analysis but for the divine dispensing of the Triune God as life into the believers' tripartite being—spirit, soul, and body. Because of justification, which is unto life (5:18), and because of God's righteousness applied to us in Christ, our spirit is life (8:10). Certainly, the spirit here is the God-created human spirit, which has been regenerated, that is, born of God the Spirit (John 3:6), and now this regenerated spirit of the believers is life itself. We should note that Paul does not say, "The spirit is alive," or, "The spirit is living"; he says, "The spirit is life." This is amazing! The Spirit of life, Christ as the life-giving Spirit (v. 2; 1 Cor. 15:45), has entered into our spirit, enlivened our deadened spirit, and caused us to be born of the God of eternal life in our spirit, and thus our regenerated spirit, being mingled with and one with the Spirit of life, is life itself. The Greek word for *life* in Romans 8:10 is *zoe*, the word consistently used in the New Testament to denote the divine life, the eternal life, the life of God. This divine life has been mingled with our spirit, causing our reborn spirit to be *zoe*. If our eyes are opened to this tremendous reality, we will declare, "My spirit is *zoe*!" For our regenerated spirit to be life, *zoe*, indicates that the regenerated human spirit is no longer merely human—the spirit is also divine. The regenerated spirit of the believers is both human and divine; it is humanly divine and divinely human. Because our spirit is life, when we set our mind, the leading part of the soul, on the spirit (the mingled spirit), our mind becomes life (*zoe*). "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace" (v. 6). Although our bodies will not become life until we are transfigured, the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead may impart life (*zoe*) to our mortal bodies (v. 11). Thus, all three parts of our being either become life or receive life. This is the divine dispensing of the Triune God as life into our tripartite being for the accomplishment of the divine economy.

The Organic Union

The book of Romans corresponds to the revelation in the Bible as a whole regarding the organic union in God's relationship with the believers in Christ. The emphasis on the organic union—a union in life—is an outstanding feature of Paul's writings (Gal. 1:16; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor.

5:17; 12:2). Through believing into Christ (John 3:15) (not merely in Him), we have been joined to Him in a marvelous organic union. Faith in Christ produces an organic union through believing. Through this organic union with Christ, we share whatever Christ is and has (1 Cor. 1:30).

Not only have we believed into Christ—we have also been baptized into Christ. "Are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3). Paul goes on to say that we have been buried with Christ through baptism into His death and that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we also may walk in newness of life (v. 4). Verse 5 continues: "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." Consider the following commentary:

This denotes an organic union in which growth takes place, so that one partakes of the life and characteristics of the other. In the organic union with Christ, whatever Christ passed through has become our history. His death and resurrection are now ours because we are in Him and are organically joined to Him. This is grafting (11:24). Such a grafting (1) discharges all our negative elements, (2) resurrects our God-created faculties, (3) uplifts our faculties, (4) enriches our faculties, and (5) saturates our entire being to transform us. (Recovery Version, Rom. 6:5, note 1).

In grafting, two similar lives are joined and then grow together organically. Grafting can be effective only if the lives to be grafted are similar. Because our human life was made in the image of God and according to the likeness of God, it can be joined to the divine life (Gen. 1:26). Our human life resembles the divine life; therefore, the divine life and the human life can be grafted together and grow together organically. This is exactly what happened when we believed into Christ and were baptized into Him. We, the branches of the wild olive tree, were grafted into the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:17, 24), and now we should live and grow as part of this tree. To use the metaphor of the vine and branches, we have been delivered from the vine of the earth (Rev. 14:18-19) and grafted into Christ as the true vine (John 15:1), and now we should abide in the vine, drawing all our life from Him. This is the grafted life in the organic union with Christ.

The grafted life is not an exchanged life but the mingling of the human life with the divine life. However, some Christian teachers erroneously regard the Christian life as an exchanged life. According to this concept the Lord asks us to give up our poor life in exchange for His superior life. Supposedly, we should now yield our human life to the Lord so that He may exchange it with His divine life. As described in Romans and elsewhere in the New Testament,

the Christian life is not an exchanged life but a grafted life, the mingling of the human life with the divine life. There is no exchange, or trade, of lives; instead of exchange there is the dispensing of the divine life, the Triune God as life, into the human life and the mingling of the divine life with the human life. In this mingling, this grafting, the human life is not eliminated but rather is strengthened, uplifted, and enriched by the divine life. In the grafted life portrayed by the vine with the branches in John 15, the branch still retains its essential characteristics, but its life is uplifted and transformed by being grafted into a better life. The higher life subdues the lower life and enriches, uplifts, and transforms the lower life. It is a wonderful reality for the believers, in their Christian experience, to be one with the Lord to live a grafted life.

The apostle Paul had a deep realization of the fact that, as believers in Christ, we should live a grafted life—a life in which we are one spirit with the Lord and live in an organic union with Him (1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:1, 4-5). The Bible reveals that the relationship which God desires to have with man is that He and man become one and live as

spirit, a spirit grafted with Christ (Rom. 8:4-5, 16). This living is not only personal but also corporate, for through grafting we are united with Christ, mingled with Christ, and incorporated with Christ to become the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). As Paul tells us, we are one Body in Christ, having an organic union with Him; this union makes us one with Christ and with all the other members of His Body (1 Cor. 12:26-27). The Body, an organic entity, is held together in the organic union with Christ, and the actuality of the Body is our remaining in the organic union with Christ (John 15:4-5).

The Expression of God

God's original intention in His creation of humankind was that man would receive the divine life and divine nature and thereby become God's expression (Gen. 1:26; 2:7-9). Since the person God created in His image and according to His likeness for His expression was a corporate person, the expression that God desires is a corporate expression. To be a normal human being is to contact God, to receive Him, to be filled with God, and to express God. This is God's eternal intention. The fact that this intention will be consummately fulfilled is seen in Revelation 21 and 22, where we have a description of the holy city, New Jerusalem, as a corporate person bearing the image of God and having the glory of God. Thus, Genesis 1:26 will have its fulfillment in Revelation 21 and 22.

Because of the pitiful situation of fallen humanity, we may find it difficult to believe that God's original intention will ever be fulfilled.

This is where the book of Romans serves a special function. In this book we see God's way, in His complete salvation, to take sinful human beings, who had been created to express Him, and to change them into glorious sons for His corporate expression. The record in Romans reveals that this corporate expression involves the church as the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God, the experience of transformation and conformation to the image of Christ, and the practice of the unique oneness of the Body of Christ in the local church life.

The basic function of the church is to be the corporate expression of the Triune God. This understanding of the function of the church applies to the two main aspects of the church presented in Romans—the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God. The Body, by its intrinsic nature, is a corporate organic entity: "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (12:4-5). The Body of Christ, which is a reality and not merely a symbol, is an organism through which Christ, the

**The practical expression of the church
as the Body is the local churches.
Without the genuine local churches recognized
by Christ Himself, there is no practical
expression of the church as the Body of Christ.**

one. This means that God desires that the divine life and the human life be joined together to become one; this oneness is an organic union, a union in life—a grafted life. In order for us to live such a life by being grafted into Christ, the Lord Jesus had to pass through the processes of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection (1:14; 3:14; 12:24; 20:22). Christ became flesh to be the seed of David, the branch of David, so that we may be grafted together with Him (1:14; Matt. 1:1; Zech. 3:8; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). He was "cut" on the cross so that we could be grafted into Him, and He was resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit to enter into us and make us one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 6:17).

As regenerated ones, those whose spirit is life and who are one spirit with the Lord, we should live a grafted life. This is a life in which two parties are joined to live together and grow together organically (John 15:1, 4-5). After we have been grafted into Christ, we should no longer live by ourselves but allow the pneumatic Christ to live in us (Gal. 2:20). We should no longer live by our flesh or by our natural being; instead, we should live by our regenerated

unique Head, lives, moves, and expresses Himself. Those believers who live as sons of God led by the Spirit of God eventually develop a consciousness of the Body of Christ and realize that they are members of the Body of Christ and, as such, can no longer be individualistic. They know that their destiny is to live in the Body for God's corporate expression; they are not complete in themselves and must live their personal Christian life in the context of the corporate Body life.

The principle is the same with the church as the kingdom of God (14:17). God's kingdom is the realm, or sphere, where His will is done, where His heart's desire is fulfilled, where His glory is expressed, and where His enemy has no ground and no opportunity. The subject of the kingdom of God is one of the most profound topics in the Bible, and here we can address only one aspect—that the church is the practicality of the kingdom of God today (1 Cor. 4:20; Rev. 1:4-6, 9). We have been born of God to enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life (John 3:3, 5-6, 15), and today the practicality of this realm is the church. This kingdom, in its present actuality, is the genuine and proper church described in the New Testament. In this kingdom we live a corporate life for the expression of God. The goal of God's salvation, therefore, is that, even in this age, we would live in the church as the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God for the corporate expression of God. This kind of living requires two crucial and indispensable matters—the matter of transformation and conformation and the matter of the practice of the unique oneness of the Body of Christ

Whereas the function of the spirit is to contact God and contain God, the function of the soul is to express God. If we do not exercise our spirit, we cannot contact God; and if we are not transformed in our soul and then conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God, we cannot express God. First, our spirit must be regenerated to become life. Following this, our soul must be transformed into the Lord's image. According to Romans 12:2, our soul is transformed by the renewing of the mind. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18 something more is involved: "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." Glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor. For our soul to be transformed into the image of the resurrected Christ from one degree of glory to another means that the indwelling Triune God of glory is increasingly expressed through our transformed soul. As we pointed out earlier, transformation leads to conformation to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God. Transformation and conformation are parts of a single process, with conformation being a solidification of the image produced through transformation. Without the actual experience of transformation and conformation among

believers today, they cannot be the corporate expression of the Triune God.

This expression of God also demands genuine oneness—the oneness of the Spirit, which is the unique oneness of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:3-6). What is revealed in Romans, especially in chapter 16, is the practicality of this oneness in the church life. Sadly, even tragically, this practicality is neglected by the vast majority of believers today. The function of the church as the Body of Christ is to express Christ in a corporate way, and the practical expression of the church as the Body is the local churches. Without the genuine local churches recognized by Christ Himself (Rev. 1:11, 20; 22:16), there is no practical expression of the church as the Body of Christ, the function of which is to express Christ.

A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32, 17; 12:12-13, 20, 27). The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ, whereas the church revealed in 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality. The one universal church—the Body of Christ—becomes the many local churches—local expressions of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16). The unique Body of Christ is expressed in many localities as the local churches (Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11). Every local church is part of the unique, universal Body of Christ, a local expression of this Body (1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27). Universally, all the local churches are one Body, and locally, every local church is a local expression of the universal Body; therefore, a local church, as a part of the Body, is an expression of the Body. Furthermore, the local ground of the church is basically the unique oneness of the Body of Christ practiced in the local churches (Eph. 4:4; 1 Thes. 1:1). Both the universal Body of Christ and the local churches are uniquely one. There is one unique Body in the whole universe, and there is one unique local church in each locality respectively. This unique oneness is the basic element in the church life (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; 2:1-2). The churches in different localities are for the universal corporate expression of Christ (Eph. 1:23; Rev. 1:4, 11; 22:16).

If we follow the divine revelation in Romans faithfully, thoroughly, and absolutely, we will know the divine economy, experience the divine dispensing, live a grafted life in the organic union with Christ, and give ourselves to the Lord for His corporate expression through the unique Body of Christ expressed as local churches. What is profound in revelation and deep in experience becomes practical in the church life. **AFC**

Works Cited

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