

*The Lamb of God, the Baptizer,  
and the Bridegroom:  
The Gospel of Jesus Christ Revealed  
in John the Baptist's Testimony  
concerning Him in the Gospel of John*

by David Yoon

The good news to be announced to humanity is not the promise of health, happiness, and prosperity but a wonderful person—Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, there is no gospel. It is no wonder that upon the birth of Jesus, an angel of the Lord declared to some shepherds near Bethlehem, “I announce to you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people, because today a Savior has been born to you in David’s city, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). The good news of great joy for all people is the introduction of a Savior, Jesus Christ. The gospel that we have received is “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). We should “not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

God approved the apostle Paul to be entrusted with the gospel (1 Thes. 2:4). The unique focus of Paul’s gospel was Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 Cor. 2:2; Col. 1:14-19). In the book of Romans, Paul refers to himself as an apostle separated unto the gospel of God concerning “His Son...Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:1-4). Paul served God in the gospel of the Son of God (v. 9), and he clarified that his gospel was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery (16:25). Paul also testified that from Jerusalem to Illyricum he had “fully preached the gospel of Christ” (15:19). In Galatians 1:15-16 Paul says that it pleased God to reveal His Son in him so that he “might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles.” According to Ephesians 3:8, Paul carried out his stewardship of grace by announcing the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. These unsearchable riches are the unfathomable aspects of what Christ is to us, what He has for us, and what He accomplished, attained, and obtained for us (vv. 2, 7-8). The center, focus, and content of the gospel revealed in the New Testament is the unsearchably rich Christ, who is the embodiment and expression of God as well

as the centrality and universality of His economy. The good news is that Jesus Christ passed through the processes of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension for the execution of God’s full salvation, which meets our every need and fulfills God’s eternal purpose.

Before the apostle Paul proclaimed the riches of Christ as the gospel, John the Baptist offered a threefold testimony of Jesus Christ, which contained crucial aspects of the New Testament revelation of Him as the content of the gospel. The gospel announced by John the Baptist, the first person in the New Testament to proclaim the good news, is consistent with the full revelation of the entire New Testament. The Gospel of Mark opens, saying, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1) and immediately refers to the ministry of John the Baptist as the messenger of Jehovah, the “voice of one crying in the wilderness,” and the forerunner of Christ (vv. 2-3). This indicates that, as prophesied by Isaiah, the gospel of Jesus Christ began with the ministry of John the Baptist (vv. 1-8). John’s preaching of the baptism of repentance was the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Acts both Peter and Paul acknowledge that the gospel began with John the Baptist (10:37; 11:16; 13:24). F. F. Bruce affirms the importance of John’s ministry:

In all three Synoptic Gospels the record of Jesus’ public ministry is introduced by an outline of the ministry of John the Baptist. In the Acts of the Apostles the ministry of John plays a similar part in Peter’s address in the house of Cornelius (10:37) and in Paul’s synagogue address in Pisidian Antioch (13:24 f.). (34)

In Matthew 11:13 the Lord Jesus said, “All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” Similarly, in Luke 16:16 He declared, “The law and the prophets were until John; from that time the kingdom of God is proclaimed

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as the gospel.” These verses prove that the Old Testament dispensation, signified by the law and the prophets, was terminated by the ministry of John, who proclaimed the kingdom of God as the gospel (Matt. 3:2; cf. Luke 3:18). Hence, the synoptic Gospels reveal that John’s preaching of the gospel was a pivotal landmark: it terminated the dispensation of law and replaced it with the dispensation of grace.

**T**he synoptic Gospels primarily present John the Baptist’s ministry in the wilderness prior to the Lord’s baptism. They speak of John dressing in camel’s hair with a leather girdle, eating locusts and wild honey, and teaching concerning the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In contrast, the Gospel of John mainly presents John the Baptist’s ministry after the Lord’s baptism, focusing on his presentation of crucial aspects concerning the Lord’s person. According to 1:6-8, the role played by John the Baptist was mainly “that he might testify concerning the light, that all might believe through him” (v. 7). In His own words, the Lord referred to John the Baptist as “the lamp that was burning and shining” and said that “the testimony which he testifies concerning Me is true” (5:32-35). As Raymond Brown points out, in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist gives “testimony to Jesus—an indication that John puts all the stress on John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus” (58).

Roger Settedahl highlights the uniqueness of the Gospel of John in presenting John the Baptist’s testimony concerning the person of Christ:

The testimony of John the Baptist is unique to the gospel of John, as the other three gospels do not contain any testimony to the extent of John’s gospel. The content of John the Baptist’s forerunner message is one of immense importance because his message contains vital information about Jesus. (41)

John the Baptist uses three particularly expressive designations: “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29), “He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (v. 33), and the Bridegroom “who has the bride” (3:29). These three aspects of Christ—the Lamb of God, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom—encapsulate the entire history of Christ in His accomplishing of God’s New Testament economy. As the Lamb of God who takes away our sin, Christ died a vicarious death in order to obtain an eternal redemption for humankind, thereby opening the way for all the believers in Christ to be justified by God and reconciled to Him. On the solid basis of His redemption, Christ, as the One who baptizes the believers in the Spirit, carries out God’s salvation in life by imparting the divine life into them. As the Bridegroom, Christ produces the church as His organic increase and His corporate bride. In brief, the Lamb of God is related primarily to

judicial redemption—the procedure of God’s full salvation; the Baptizer is related mainly to the dispensing of the divine life into the believers—the purpose of God’s full salvation; and the Bridegroom is related principally to the church as the corporate counterpart of Christ—the product of God’s full salvation. These three statuses of Christ are intimated in the Old Testament, developed in the Gospel of John, confirmed by the apostle Paul, and completed in John’s final vision of the New Jerusalem, the aggregate symbol of the consummation of the divine economy in Revelation 21 and 22. Understanding the broad implications of the biblical revelation of Christ as the Lamb of God, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom will enrich our experience and confession of Him, deepen our enjoyment of His precious person, uplift our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and supply a powerful impetus to announce this gospel.

### The Lamb of God

When John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus coming to him, he proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). As the Lamb of God, Christ took care of the problems with both our sinful nature and our sinful deeds. When humanity fell, Satan injected sin, his poisonous nature, into the human race. With this sinful nature, fallen human beings are compelled to commit countless sins (Rom. 7:17). King Solomon confessed in his prayer to Jehovah, “There is no man who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46). One of the psalmists lamented that according to Jehovah’s observation of the sons of men, “There is none who does good; / There is not even one” (Psa. 14:3). The apostle Paul reveals that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God because all have been constituted sinners with sin dwelling within them (Rom. 3:23; 5:19; 7:20). Our sins require punishment in the sight of the righteous God. Since the wages of sin is death (6:23), the soul who sins shall die (Ezek. 18:4, 20). As sinners, we all are worthy of death under God’s righteous judgment (Rom. 1:32). However, Christ as the Lamb of God has come to take away sin from the world, that is, from humankind, by dying a redemptive death on our behalf and satisfying the demands of God’s righteousness (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6, 8; 2 Cor. 5:14). The Lamb of God died for the totality of sin, including our inward nature of sin and our outward acts of sin. One may refer to the former as “sin” and the latter as “sins.” The Lamb of God died for both. According to Hebrews 9, Christ offered Himself as a perfect substitutionary sacrifice to God not only to put away sin (v. 26) but also to bear the sins of many (v. 28). Regarding sin, Christ did not know sin but was made sin on our behalf to be judged by God so that sin might be condemned and dealt with (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3). Regarding sins, Christ died for our sins and bore up our sins in His body on the cross (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Thus, the Lamb of God who was without sin and committed no sin suffered God's judgment on the cross in order to take away both sin in our nature and sins in our conduct (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). Sin, which came into the world through one man, the first Adam, is taken away by one man, the last Adam (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:45).

Born a priest and raised in a priestly family, with parents who were well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 1:5, 13, 41-45, 67-79), John the Baptist no doubt had a strong foundation in the Old Testament. Furthermore, his immediate audience was composed of fellow Israelites who were likely to be acquainted with the Old Testament. Hence, John's introduction of Christ, as the beginning of the gospel of God, should be understood in view of the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

John the Baptist's designation of Christ as the Lamb of God is the fulfillment of Old Testament types. His description of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God was not a "special" allusion to a particular sacrificial lamb mentioned in the Old Testament rituals but a "comprehensive" allusion to the role of lambs in presenting, "in type and in figure," distinctive aspects of the redemptive work that Christ as the Lamb of God would accomplish (Trench 122). They include the lamb that portrays the death of the Servant of Jehovah (Isa. 53:7) and the lamb of the passover (Exo. 12:3-11).

#### *The Lamb of God Typified by the Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 53*

Perhaps the clearest type of Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 53. John the Baptist's familiarity with this prophetic book is indicated by the fact that he cited Isaiah 40:3-4 to describe his God-appointed role as a voice crying in the wilderness and as a forerunner to prepare the way of the Lord. In his Gospel John confirms that chapter 53 in Isaiah refers to the Lord Jesus, equating Him with the arm of Jehovah (John 12:38; Isa. 53:1). Furthermore, in Acts 8 the evangelist Philip used this passage concerning the death of the Servant of Jehovah as a meek lamb "led to slaughter" in order to announce "Jesus as the gospel" to the Ethiopian eunuch (vv. 32-35; Isa. 53:7-8).

Isaiah 53:5-6 says, "He was wounded because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities... / And Jehovah has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him." No other Old Testament type of the lamb, according to Henry Alford, so expressly states "the connexion...between *the lamb*, and the...*taking away of sin*" as that of the suffering Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 53 (467). When God was judging Christ on the cross, God removed our iniquities and caused them to fall on Christ, making Him, in the sight of God, the unique

sinner at that moment (Matt. 27:45-46). Christ's death was not merely a wrongful execution of a righteous man perpetrated by lawless men; more significantly, it was a legal judgment executed upon a judicial Substitute carried out by God Himself according to His righteous law. Hence, Christ died a vicarious death for us sinners (1 Pet. 3:18). It was for this purpose that He made Himself an offering for sin and poured out His life unto death (Isa. 53:10, 12; John 10:17-18). This thought is further confirmed by Isaiah 53:8, which says, "He was cut off out of the land of the living / For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due." Verse 11 similarly predicts the substitutionary death of Christ, saying, "He will bear their iniquities." Christ as the Lamb of God was delivered for our offenses, and His death accomplished a judicial redemption for us (Rom. 4:25).<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Lamb of God Typified by the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12*

Christ as the Lamb of God is also typified by the lamb of

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the passover. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul says that "our Passover, Christ" has been sacrificed for us. According to Exodus 12, the passover lamb was taken on the tenth day of the first month of the year and was examined for four days to confirm that it was unblemished (vv. 2-3, 5); then it was killed on the fourteenth day (v. 6). Similarly, the Lord Jesus as the real Passover lamb was examined for four days before He was crucified on the day of the passover (Mark 14:12; John 18:28). During these four days, He was examined three times according to Jewish law by the leaders of the Jews (Mark 11:27—12:37; 14:53-65; John 18:13, 19-24) and another three times according to Roman law by Pilate, the Roman governor (v. 28—19:6). Eventually, Pilate declared that he found no fault in Him (18:38; 19:4, 6). Because no blemish was found in Him, He was proven to be perfect and qualified to be the Lamb required by God for the accomplishing of His redemption so that God might pass over sinners without having to judge them.

According to Exodus 11 and 12, in order to force Pharaoh to release the children of Israel from their slavery in

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Egypt (1:8-14), Jehovah passed through the land of Egypt and destroyed the firstborn of every household. Pharaoh typifies Satan, and Egypt typifies the world, a “slave house” under Satan’s tyranny (Micah 6:4; Eph. 2:1-3). The destiny of the firstborn of every household in Egypt signifies man’s destiny to suffer God’s righteous judgment and condemnation on the fallen world. However, in order to deliver the children of Israel from His judgment, Jehovah commanded them to kill a lamb without blemish and apply the blood of the lamb to the lintel and the doorposts of their houses (Exo. 12:6-7). Jehovah pledged that, when executing judgment on Egypt, He would not destroy the Israelites who were covered by the blood of the passover lamb: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there will be no plague upon you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (v. 13). The blood on the doorposts and on the lintel of the house typifies the redeeming blood of Christ as the “Lamb without blemish and without spot” that delivers us from God’s judgment on the world (Matt. 26:28; John 19:34; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). When God sees the blood of Christ applied to us, He passes over us. Moreover, Jehovah instructed the children of Israel to eat the flesh of the passover lamb (Exo. 12:8), signifying God’s intention that His chosen people would partake of the Lamb in order to be nourished with the riches of His life. In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus spoke of His flesh as “true food” (6:55) and told us to eat “the flesh of the Son of Man” that we might “have life” (v. 53). Here the flesh signifies the edible life of Christ as our supply (10:10). The application of the blood of the Lamb is for us to be redeemed judicially from God’s righteous condemnation and death-judgment, and the eating of the flesh of the Lamb is for us to be saved organically through the impartation of Christ’s life into us.

### *The Lamb of God Being a God-man*

John the Baptist’s designation of Christ as the Lamb of God recognizes both Christ’s incarnation, through His assumption of flesh and blood, and Christ’s redemption, accomplished through His death on the cross. In the same chapter where Christ is introduced as the Lamb of God (1:29), He is revealed as the Word who became flesh (v. 1, 14). For the Word to become flesh is for God to become a man by taking on human life and nature. Hence, the Lamb of God refers to the incarnated Christ, a God-man who possesses not only divinity by virtue of being the Word but also humanity by virtue of becoming flesh and tabernacling among us. Christ’s dual natures as both the complete God and the perfect man are implied by John the Baptist’s testimony in verse 15: “He who is coming after me has become ahead of me, because He was before me.” In other words, Christ’s human birth came several months after that of John the Baptist, but Christ’s divine, eternal existence preceded John the Baptist (Col. 1:17; cf. John 8:58). When the Lamb of

God was crucified, He died not as a mere man but as a God-man. As a man, Christ was part of humankind and could serve as “a ransom for many” and suffer the punishment for sins (Mark 10:45; Gal. 1:4; Rom. 5:8). As God, He was able to obtain an eternal redemption for us through the eternal Spirit, His divinity assuring the universal, timeless effectiveness of His vicarious death (Heb. 9:12). Only this unique God-man, the Lamb of God, was qualified to accomplish an eternal redemption with an application that knows no limits.

**T**he Lamb of God constitutes good news to the human beings who live in bondage, those who are weighed down by the power and guilt of sin, awaiting God’s righteous judgment against them. Their basic need is to behold the Lamb of God who was manifested to put away sin and take away sins. As the Lamb of God, Christ presented Himself as a perfect offering, as a lamb without blemish and without spot, for the sins of humankind. He delivered Himself to the cross and suffered a vicarious death for the accomplishment of an eternal redemption. Now all who repent of their sins and believe into Christ may be released from their sins, be justified by God, and partake of the divine life for their enjoyment. The judicial redemption accomplished by the Lamb of God is a marvelous foundation for the gospel of God.

### *The Baptizer*

Shortly after directing others to behold “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), John the Baptist testified that he beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven and abiding upon the Lamb (v. 32). He then made the following God-given proclamation: “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, this is He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (v. 33). He concluded, saying, “I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” (v. 34). After introducing Christ as the Lamb of God, John the Baptist presented Him as the Lamb with the dove, that is, the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. The sequence of the presentation of these two statuses of Christ points to the fact that after the Lamb of God died a vicarious death to accomplish redemption on our behalf, the Baptizer, as “the dispenser of the Spirit,” immersed us in the Holy Spirit to carry out God’s salvation in the divine life (Ridderbos 76). Redemption is the necessary first step in God’s full salvation. However, judicial redemption is not the end of God’s full salvation; rather, it is only the basis for the organic salvation that Christ is now administering among His believers through the working of His divine life in them. Judicial redemption satisfies the righteous requirement of God for the forgiveness of our sins, but organic salvation satisfies God’s desire to impart Himself as life into us for the producing of His corporate expression. The gospel that we have received and preach

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is not merely one of sinners being justified by God, but one in which God's redeemed people can be regenerated and transformed by the divine life to fulfill God's heart's desire.

### *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*

John the Baptist baptized in water, but Christ the Baptizer baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Water signifies death and burial for the termination of repenting people; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and resurrection for the germination of the terminated people. In his ministry of repentance, John baptized the repenting people in water, "burying them" in the death of Christ. This terminated their sins, their past, and their former manner of living. In His ministry of life, Christ baptizes people in the Holy Spirit, raising them up with the divine life so that they might be regenerated in the Spirit of His resurrection life to become children of God (v. 33; Mark 1:8; John 1:12-13).

Witness Lee further expounds upon the significance of Christ's spiritual baptism:

The Holy Spirit, into whom Christ has baptized the believers, is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9). Hence, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and even into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). (*Conclusion* 2847-2848)

As the Baptizer, Christ transferred the believers out of Adam into Himself, a living person, so that they may take Him as their realm and enter into an organic union with Him. He brought the believers into a spiritual and mystical union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and He placed the believers into the Body of Christ, a living organism, so that they may live in the Body. In short, baptism in the Spirit brings us into a life-union with Christ and the Triune God, making us living members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), an organic corporate entity. God's salvation in life involves the gradual development of our organic union with the Triune God, which begins with the regeneration of our spirit, proceeds through the transformation of our soul, and culminates in the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:6, 10-11, 23).

**B**aptism in the Spirit is for the initiation and development of our union with the Triune God. The organic implications of this baptism are most clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 12:13, which says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit."

To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and to be lost in Him; to drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with Him. By these two

procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever. (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 5)

**A**s the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Christ imparts the divine life into us in order to carry out God's organic salvation for the development of our life-union with Him (Rom. 5:10). It is by the Spirit that we are regenerated (John 3:6), renewed (Titus 3:5), sanctified (2 Thes. 2:13), transformed (2 Cor. 3:18), and glorified (1 Pet. 4:14; Eph. 4:30). Our baptism in the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the gospel, signaling the commencement of a lifetime of enjoying the Spirit and experiencing the salvation in the divine life through an organic union with Him.

### *The Baptizer Being the Dove Abiding upon the Lamb*

According to John the Baptist, Christ as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit is identified as the Lamb with the dove

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abiding upon Him. We may describe Him in this status as the Dove-Lamb. The dove, a symbol of the Spirit, resting upon the Lamb, Christ, speaks of the intrinsic relationship between Christ and the Spirit presented in the New Testament. When Jesus was glorified in His resurrection (John 7:39; Luke 24:26; 1 Cor. 15:43; Acts 3:13, 15), His humanity, with all His experiences, accomplishments, obtainments, and attainments, was compounded into the Spirit of God. Hence, the Spirit is now "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19), who possesses both the divinity of God and the humanity of Christ. The Spirit has not only God's excelling attributes but also Christ's perfect human virtues and the processes that He passed through—Christ's God-expressing human living with its sufferings, His redemptive death with its eternal efficacy, His victorious resurrection with its power and glory, and His all-transcending ascension with its authority and honor. In terms of the content of the gospel, this represents a truly significant development beyond the foundational revelation of Christ as the Lamb of God. It is with this understanding that the apostle Paul declared that the last Adam, Christ, "became a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45) and

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that “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). The ultimate significance of the dove abiding on the Lamb is that “the Dove-Lamb is the pneumatic Christ,” the resurrected Christ who is the life-giving Spirit, to impart the divine life into us (Lee, *Fulfillment* 43).

The revelation that the Dove-Lamb signifies the life-giving Spirit is consistent with John 1:32 and 33. Verse 32 likens the Spirit descending and abiding on Christ to a dove, and verse 33 speaks of Christ as He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Holy Spirit, into whom the believers have been baptized, is the dove. This suggests that the dove signifies the Spirit of Christ, who is also called the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:9, 2).

**T**he life-giving function of the Spirit as a dove is prefigured by the brooding Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2. As Witness Lee states, “The first symbol of the Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments is a bird” (*Spirit* 41). In Genesis the illustrative symbol is that of a bird hovering over its young to produce life: “The Spirit of God was brooding upon the surface of the waters” (1:2). Brooding is primarily a matter of life; hence, the Spirit of God here is mainly the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). Just as a hen broods over her eggs to produce chicks, the Spirit of God as the Spirit of life came to brood over the waters to generate life for God’s purpose (cf. Matt. 23:37). The primary work of the dove hovering over the Lamb in John 1:32 is also to produce life, that is, to dispense the divine life into the believers based upon the Lamb’s redemption so that they might be regenerated to become children of God. “The Spirit as the brooding bird and as the dove is for the producing of life” (Lee, *Spirit* 32).

In order for us to fully experience and enjoy God, we need to know Christ as both the Lamb and the Dove. The Lamb is the Redeemer who takes sin away from us, and the Dove is the life-giving Spirit who imparts God as life into us. The Lamb separates us from sin, and the dove unites us with God. Like John the Baptist, we should announce the gospel not only of the sin-removing Lamb but also of the life-dispensing Dove. Such a gospel befits God’s economy, which is “to send His Son to be the Lamb with His Spirit as the dove to accomplish redemption and to impart life to man” (Lee, *Life-study* 46).

### **The Bridegroom**

After he introduced the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Baptizer, the Lamb with the Dove, and shortly before his ministry was terminated by his imprisonment, John the Baptist completed his testimony concerning Christ by presenting Him as the Bridegroom: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (John 3:29). All genuine Christians acknowledge that Christ is the Redeemer, the Lamb of God. Not as many see that Christ is the Bap-

tizer, the Lamb with the Dove, the One who baptizes the believers in the Holy Spirit and dispenses the divine life into them. Even fewer realize that Christ is the Bridegroom who desires to gain a bride. Christ is the Lamb of God and the Baptizer so that He may be the Bridegroom, the One who desires to marry the church as His bride.<sup>3</sup> The goal of Christ’s judicial redemption and organic salvation is to bring forth the church as His spouse. In the economy of God’s salvation, all Christ’s work is directed to the fulfillment of His heart’s desire to gain a glorious counterpart.

### ***The Bible Being a Romance between God and His Elect***

In this light the Bible is the record of a divine romance between a universal couple. The Husband of this couple is God, embodied in Christ and realized as the Spirit, and the wife is a corporate human being composed of all God’s redeemed elect, including the Old Testament and New Testament saints. The entire revelation of the Bible, at its core, presents the holy love story of God and His elect, with the universe as the setting of God’s wooing and wedding. This universal divine-human romance between God and His people is the central theme of the Holy Scriptures, the intrinsic content of the divine economy, and the great telos of the entire creation.

**T**he Old Testament abounds with both implicit and explicit references to God as the Husband and His people as the spouse. In particular, four Jewish prophets refer to God’s desire to have a married life with His people. Isaiah 54:5 identifies Jehovah God, the Creator, as the Husband of His people, implying that they were created expressly to marry Him: “Your Maker is your Husband; / Jehovah of hosts is His name.” Ezekiel 16:8 reveals that the covenant of the law, enacted by God on Mount Sinai, was an engagement contract in which the Israelites were betrothed to Him (cf. Exo. 20:1-21):

Then I passed by you and saw you; and then was your time a time of love. And I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness; indeed I swore unto you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord Jehovah, and you became Mine.

This is confirmed by Jeremiah 31:32, which says, “Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, declares Jehovah.” Finally, Hosea 2 suggests that although the children of Israel broke the covenant of marriage with God by turning to other gods as their extramarital lovers (3:1), He intends to recover them into a faithful, affectionate marriage union:

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In that day, declares Jehovah, / You will call Me My Husband / ...I will betroth you to Myself forever; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself / In righteousness and justice / And in lovingkindness and compassions; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness, / And you will know Jehovah. (2:16, 19-20)

In each of the synoptic Gospels, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the Bridegroom whose presence is the believers' supreme enjoyment (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34). As a Bridegroom coming for His bride, Christ is the most lovely and pleasant person, who is the believers' attraction, delight, and satisfaction. The Lord also spoke of the believers as virgins who go forth to meet the bridegroom and enter into the wedding feast (Matt. 25:1, 6, 10). Moreover, in 22:2 the Lord said, "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son." The king signifies God, and the son signifies Christ. God has prepared a universal marriage feast, and Christ is its unique center. As the Bridegroom in the marriage feast prepared by God, Christ is the focus of God's New Testament economy. The phrase *for his son* reveals that Christ is not only the Accomplisher but also the Beneficiary of God's economy, the goal of which is to obtain a counterpart for Christ. Nothing delights God the Father more than presiding over the marriage dinner of the Lamb, in which Christ, His beloved Son, presents the glorious church to Himself as a bride who has made herself ready (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7-9). Christ came to the earth not only to deliver sinners from God's judgment but also to bring the believers into the enjoyment of His delightful presence and to satisfy the Father's desire to prepare a marriage feast for His Son.

**E**choing the Lord Jesus' pronouncements on His status as the Bridegroom and the believers as the virgins who await Him, the apostle Paul said to the believers in Corinth, "I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). As a man thoroughly acquainted with the desire of God's heart for a counterpart (Eph. 1:5, 9), Paul burned with "a jealousy of God" as a husband over his wife. As a new covenant minister whose sole ambition was to be well pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9), the apostle labored to espouse the church to Christ, her proper Husband. The primary motive for our proclamation of the gospel does not lie in the benefit of man but in the interest of God. The highest incentive for preaching the glad tidings is not to rescue the perishing from God's eternal punishment but to espouse believers to Christ as their Husband for the realization of God's good pleasure by gaining a counterpart for His Son. If we are faithful to betroth the believers to Christ as their Husband, we will participate in the preparation of Christ's bride. We will fulfill His yearning for a counterpart and thereby enter into His joy at His second coming

(cf. Matt. 25:21, 23). In anticipation of this, John the Baptist perceived the Lord's delight in His bride, testifying, "The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This joy of mine therefore is made full" (John 3:29).

### *The Bride of Christ Being His Increase*

Immediately after speaking of Christ as the Bridegroom who has the bride (v. 29), John the Baptist declared, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30). Many commentators interpret this declaration as John the Baptist's acknowledgement of the superiority of Christ, of his intentional subordination of his ministry, and of his willingness to see Christ's influence grow at the expense of his own.<sup>4</sup> However, many do not see that *He must increase* refers to His bride. This failure to recognize the connection between Christ's increase and the Bridegroom's bride obscures one of John the Baptist's greatest revelations, namely that of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as His corporate bride, His organic increase.

*Christ is the Bridegroom,  
the One who desires to marry  
the church as His bride. The goal  
of Christ's judicial redemption and  
organic salvation is to bring forth  
the church as His spouse.*

As the infinite God, Christ need not and cannot increase in Himself. He can, however, increase in and through the believers by imparting Himself into them in order to make them a matching counterpart.

**I**f we consider John the Baptist's word concerning the increase of Christ in the context of John chapter 3, we will see that His increase, His bride, refers to a living composition of the regenerated believers, those who have been born of the Spirit to receive the life of God (vv. 6, 16, 36). In the Gospel of John, a book on the increase of Christ, the apostle John states that life is in Christ (1:4), that Christ is life (14:6), and that the purpose of Christ's coming was that we might have life (10:10). According to 3:16, Christ was given to us so that we would have eternal life. Verse 6 reveals that our receiving the divine life in addition to the human life is the significance of our regeneration—the process whereby we are "born of the Spirit" in our spirit. Through our regeneration Christ as the divine life is imparted into us, making us the embodiment of God's life and thus the organic increase of Christ, in whom is life and who is life itself (1 John 5:11-12).<sup>5</sup>

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The regenerated believers are the increase of Christ and constitute His bride corporately. Therefore, in order to prepare the bride of Christ, we should not only nurture a personal, affectionate, bridal love for Him but also aspire to be built up with fellow believers into the church to become His corporate counterpart (1 Cor. 12:24; 1 Pet. 2:5). The bride whom the Lord will marry at His return is not a multitude of individualistic mystics; rather, she is the church as the full-grown Body of Christ in which the overcoming believers are built up together in love (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:12-16).

### **The Redeeming, Sanctifying, and Bride-presenting Christ in Ephesians 5:25-27**

The apostle Paul affirms and reinforces John the Baptist's presentation of the three aspects of Christ as the Lamb, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom to carry out God's New Testament economy in a single sentence in Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish. (5:25-27)

In these verses Christ is presented as the self-sacrificing Redeemer, then as the organic Sanctifier, and finally as the expectant Bride-presenter, a sequence that corresponds to John the Baptist's testimony concerning Christ as the Lamb, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom.

On the cross Christ, as the Redeeming Lamb, loved the church and gave Himself up for her (v. 25), shedding His blood to purchase the church and releasing His divine life to impart it into her in resurrection (Acts 20:28; John 19:34). The redemptive and generative death of Christ provides the basis upon which Christ sanctifies the church by the washing of the water in the word, that is, by the flowing of the divine life in the word (cf. 4:14; Rev. 22:1). The *word* mentioned here is in effect the Spirit. In Ephesians 6:17 Paul says, "Receive...the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God."<sup>6</sup> This thought is confirmed by Christ Himself in John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Christ's spoken words embody the life-giving Spirit. Today Christ as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying us by washing us in the flowing life of God in the word (7:38-39; Rev. 22:1). This causes God's holy nature to spread throughout our inward parts and cleanses away our blemishes, such as spots, expressions of the natural life, and wrinkles, manifestations of the old man (cf. Eph. 4:17-22). When we as the church are cleansed from every blemish and are saturated with the life of God, we will be fully prepared as the bride

who matches Christ in His divine life, holy nature, and glorious expression. Just as Christ is holy (Acts 2:27; 3:14), glorious (Heb. 1:3), and without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19), so also the church as His match will be holy (Eph. 1:4; 1 Thes. 3:13), glorious (Eph. 3:21), and without blemish (5:27; Rev. 14:5). When the church becomes the same as Christ in His life, nature, and expression, He will come back and present her to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction and rest in love (cf. Zeph. 3:17). Therefore, both Christ's redemptive death and His organic sanctification are ultimately for His bride-presentation. In the past, Christ as the Lamb of God died to purchase the church; in the present, Christ as the Spirit is sanctifying and beautifying the church by the operation of His divine life; and in the future, Christ as the Bridegroom will present the holy, glorious, and unblemished bride to Himself for His delight and satisfaction.

This is the magnificent topstone of the gospel. The good news is not just that we have obtained release from our sins through Christ's precious blood. The good news includes even more than transformation by the divine life, which makes us holy and without blemish. In its ultimate form, the gospel reveals that we can corporately become a worthy, resplendent, and well-pleasing bride for our Lord Jesus Christ. It is for this purpose that He gave up His life for us as the Lamb, and it is for this purpose that He indwells us as the Spirit to organically reconstitute us. The intimate life-union that we possess with Christ as the Spirit in our spirit reaches a pinnacle in the mutual delight of a bridegroom and a bride on their wedding day. In our experience this will mark the completion of God's masterful plan of full salvation. Such glad tidings should fill us with profound joy and abundant hope, constraining us to declare the happy news to all those around us. Since we will be joined in marriage to the most lovely person, we cannot but jubilantly join with Him to issue the universal invitation, saying, "Come!" (cf. Rev. 22:17). Come in order to be washed of sins, transformed by the divine life, and built into the glorious bride.

### **The New Jerusalem**

John the Baptist's testimony concerning the threefold status of Christ as the Lamb, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom is completed at the conclusion of the entire Bible. This is the highest peak of the gospel. The book of Revelation opens with the explanation that this book presents "the revelation of Jesus Christ," which God made known by "signs," or symbols with spiritual significance. The last and greatest of these signs is the New Jerusalem, which is not a material structure but the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ shown in a symbolic vision. The New Jerusalem is the consummation and "embodiment of all that Christ is" (Lee, *Building* 41). Hence, all that Christ accomplishes in time as the Lamb,



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the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom will not disappear with the end of time but will carry on and even be brought into ultimate fruition in eternity future. Christ's work to redeem the believers, impart Himself as life into them, and produce them as His corporate bride finds its eternal completion in the New Jerusalem.

### *The Lamb*

The prominent place given to Christ as the Lamb of God in the New Jerusalem is indicated by the fact that the word *Lamb* is mentioned seven times in relation to the holy city (21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). In eternity past Christ was appointed to be the Lamb to accomplish redemption (1 Pet. 1:19-20). In the fullness of the time Christ came to die as the Lamb for the accomplishment of redemption (Gal. 4:4-5; John 1:29). In eternity future Christ will still be the Lamb as a memorial of redemption (Rev. 22:1). The Lamb will sit on the throne forever (v. 3), reminding us of His eternally efficacious redemptive work (Heb. 9:14). We will forever remember that Christ purchased us at a tremendous cost, shedding His precious blood in order that we might have the right to enjoy Him as the tree of life in the holy city (Rev. 2:7; 22:14).

**T**he New Jerusalem reveals that our experience of the Triune God is through Christ as the redeeming Lamb. Revelation 21:22 tells us that "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" are the temple of the holy city. The Greek word translated "temple" denotes the inner temple, the Holy of Holies. God and the Lamb are the Holy of Holies, the place in which the redeemed saints dwell and serve God. The phrase *the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb* refers to the redeeming Triune God, that is, God embodied in Christ as the redeeming Lamb. Apart from the redeeming death of the Lamb, which satisfied the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, we cannot live or serve in God. We were once far off from God (Eph. 2:13), yet because Christ reconciled us to God (v. 16), we "have become near in the blood of Christ" and have access unto the Father through Christ (vv. 13, 18). Christ, as the Lamb of God with His redemptive blood, is our unique qualification for gaining access to the Triune God as our temple for eternity.

Moreover, in the New Jerusalem the redeeming Lamb will be the lamp that contains God as the light and shines Him forth into the redeemed saints. Revelation 21:23 says, "The city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." God as the light illumines the city through the Lamb as the lamp. "God is light" (1 John 1:5), and as the divine light He is embodied in and expressed through the Lamb, the redeeming Christ, as the lamp (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). As the lamp the Lamb

radiates God as light into the redeemed saints. God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), yet in Christ God becomes approachable. Because we are sinful, we cannot contact God as light without Christ as the Redeemer. As the Lamb of God, Christ is the unique Mediator between God and man (2:5). Because the divine light shines through the Lamb, the Redeemer, this light has become lovable and touchable. We can walk in the divine light, assured that the blood of the Lamb "cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). In the New Jerusalem we will forever enjoy the pleasant illumination of the glory of God contained and expressed in the redeeming Christ as the Lamb-lamp.

**T**he throne in the New Jerusalem, the center of the holy city, is called "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1, 3; cf. 3:21). This indicates that there is one throne for both God and the Lamb. Just as God as the light is in the Lamb as the lamp and shines from within and through Him (21:23), so also God sits on the throne in the Lamb to administrate the universe in

*As the Lamb of God, Christ died to purchase the church; as the Spirit, Christ is sanctifying and beautifying the church; and as the Bridegroom, Christ will present the holy, glorious, and unblemished bride to Himself.*

and through Him (Eph. 1:10). Moreover, the phrase *the throne of God and of the Lamb* reveals that God and the Lamb are one as the Lamb-God, the redeeming God (cf. Rev. 17:14). Hence, this throne is not only the throne of authority, from which Christ carries out God's government in His eternal kingdom; it is also the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), out of which flows the river of water of life in order to supply His redeemed people with the all-sufficient grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7).

### *The River of Water of Life*

The river of water of life proceeding out of the throne in the New Jerusalem is symbolic of Christ's work as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. In John 7:38-39 the apostle John identifies the rivers of living water flowing out of the believers' innermost being as the Spirit. Thus, the river of water of life flowing out of the center of the holy city refers to the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of life into which Christ baptized His believers (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:2). Just as the divine life streamed out of the pierced side of the crucified Redeemer in order to be dispensed

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into His believers (John 19:34), so also the life-giving Spirit, as the river of water of life, will forever proceed out of the redeeming God in order to sustain and saturate the constituents of the city of God. Our blessed destiny is to drink of the Spirit of life as the river of living water, the “river of God,” for our eternal enjoyment of the Triune God (Psa. 65:9).

**A**long the two sides of the river of water of life grows the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). The one tree of life that grows on both sides of the river signifies that the tree of life takes the form of a spreading vine. In the words of the Lord Jesus, He is also the true vine, a tree, and life itself (John 15:1, 5; 11:25; 14:6). Hence, the tree of life with its abundantly rich fruits signifies Christ with His unsearchable riches as the food supply for God’s redeemed elect (Rev. 22:2; Eph. 3:8). The close relationship between the tree of life and the river of water of life signals that where the Spirit flows, the life supply of Christ is found. In the same way that the river conveys the tree, the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, bears and imparts Christ as the life supply into the believers for eternity. In other words, the Spirit incorporates the operation of Christ to supply the believers with His riches.

Furthermore, John the Baptist’s prophecy that Christ will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire will be fulfilled in eternity future (Matt. 3:11). Depending on whether or not one believes into Him, Christ’s baptism will be either for eternal life in the Holy Spirit or eternal perdition in fire. Unbelievers will experience Christ’s baptism in fire when they are cast into the lake of fire, where they will suffer eternal punishment, being tormented “day and night forever and ever” and being burnt with “unquenchable fire” (vv. 10, 12; Rev. 20:10, 14-15). In contrast, believers will enjoy the consummate issue of the Lord’s baptism in the Holy Spirit, as they are ushered into the New Jerusalem, a city of water, where they will drink the Spirit as the river of water of life, the river of God’s pleasures, for their eternal satisfaction (Psa. 36:8-9).

### *The Husband*

Christ’s great work to produce and build up His corporate counterpart will also consummate in the holy city. The New Jerusalem is “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” and is called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:2, 9-10). As the wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem takes Christ as her Husband and exists for His satisfaction in love. Christ’s desire to have a holy and glorious counterpart will be fully satisfied when He enters into an eternal marriage union with all His elect as the constituents of the holy city that has the glory of God (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:2, 11). For eternity, Christ will live a blissful married life with the ultimate object of His affection.

**I**n the Old Testament, Jerusalem refers to God’s people not only in a general way (Psa. 125:2; Jer. 8:5) but also in their status as His spouse. For instance, in the Song of Songs, a portrait of the affectionate relationship between Christ and His lovers, Solomon (typifying Christ) describes the Shulammitte (typifying a lover of Christ) as being “as lovely as Jerusalem” (6:4). In Ezekiel 23:1-4 the city of Jerusalem symbolizes the children of Israel as the wife of Jehovah. Just as the Old Testament symbol of Jerusalem does not denote the physical city but the people of God, so also the New Jerusalem denotes God’s people as His counterpart, not a physical place. The New Jerusalem is not a literal city but a corporate person—the wife of Christ composed of the believers who have been redeemed by the Lamb of God and divinized by the operation of the life-giving Spirit within them.

The phrases *the wife of the Lamb* and *the marriage of the Lamb* both join two of the designations of Christ uttered by John the Baptist: the Lamb and the Bridegroom (Rev. 21:9; 19:7). The Husband in the New Jerusalem is the Lamb—the incarnated Christ who loved us and gave Himself up for us in order to redeem us to God. The fact that our eternal Husband will be the Lamb implies not only His loving, redemptive death for us but also the perpetuity of His status as the Son of Man. For eternity, our Husband will retain His humanity and remain a God-man in a union of divinity and humanity. In keeping with the God-ordained principle concerning marriage, a husband and a wife must be of the same kind (Gen. 2:22-24). Those who constitute the wife of Christ must therefore be God-men in a union of humanity and divinity. Hence, the Lamb and His wife will both be divine and human. The eternal loving couple in the divine romance is composed of One who is God yet man—God who has become man without abandoning His unique Godhead—and one who is man yet God—men who have become God in life, nature, and expression without participating in any way in His Godhead.

The compound subject *the Spirit and the bride* in Revelation 22:17 is the culmination of the great mystery of “Christ and the church” in Ephesians 5:32; as such, it is the ultimate descriptor of the universal couple. The expression *the Spirit and the bride* implies two consummations, one for God and one for man. Although in His eternal self-existence, the Triune God is complete and unchanging, in His economy of salvation, the Triune God in Christ passed through a process—involving incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection—and was consummated as the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The Spirit may be said to be the consummation of the Triune God because the Spirit is the reality of Christ as the embodiment of God, transmitting all that Christ is and has to the believers. Both phrases, *the wife of the Lamb* and *the Spirit and the bride*, imply the process the Triune God underwent in Christ. *The wife of*

*the Lamb* identifies the Husband of the New Jerusalem as the Lamb—the incarnated and crucified Christ, the Christ who became flesh and accomplished redemption by His death. *The Spirit and the bride* identifies the Husband as the Spirit—the resurrected Christ who is the life-giving Spirit. Together, these two expressions reveal that Christ became a man in His incarnation, died a redemptive death in His crucifixion, and became the life-giving Spirit in His resurrection in order to be joined in marriage to the church as His bride. When the Spirit enters into God's redeemed elect, they begin to undergo a process that ends with their being made the same as He is in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. This process commences with the regeneration of the human spirit, continues with the transformation of the soul, and concludes with the glorification of the body when the believers are consummated to be the bride fully adorned for her Husband. The divine romance presented throughout the entire Bible culminates in a wondrous marriage of two consummated persons—the Spirit, who is the consummation of the processed Triune God, and the bride, who is the consummation of the deified tripartite church.

### Conclusion

The ministry of John the Baptist signaled the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' forerunner was inspired by the Holy Spirit and presented three particular descriptions of Christ that foreshadowed the major components of God's New Testament economy—Lamb of God, Baptizer, and Bridegroom. Although John the Baptist provided no detailed explanation concerning these aspects of Christ, the Scriptures unfold and confirm their rich implications. As the Lamb, the Baptizer, and the Bridegroom, Christ is the center and circumference of God's economy. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the incarnate Christ, the God-man who loved us and laid down His life on our behalf to accomplish God's judicial redemption (1 John 3:16). The Baptizer in the Holy Spirit is the pneumatic Christ, the Lamb with the Dove who imparts the divine life into us to perfect us in God's organic salvation. The Bridegroom who has the bride is the Christ who produces and builds up the church as His organic increase and beloved counterpart, God's corporate expression. The redemption accomplished by the Lamb is the basis upon which the life-giving Spirit carries out God's salvation in life, which is, in turn, the means by which the Bridegroom prepares and adorns His bride. The Lamb's redemption is the solid base of the gospel; the Spirit's salvation in life is the primary focus of the gospel; and the Bridegroom's presentation of His bride is the ultimate goal of the gospel. The gospel implied by John the Baptist begins by reaching the vilest sinner in his lowest condition and concludes by the realization of God's heart's desire in those who have been predestinated unto glory.

In God's sovereignty, John the Baptist completed his testimony concerning Christ by revealing Him as the Lamb (the Redeemer), the Baptizer (the Life-giver), and the Bridegroom (the Bride-presenter). Following the pattern of John the Baptist, we also need to complete our testimony concerning Christ in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The vast majority of Christians have received and preach a gospel that includes only the sin-removing Lamb; few have been introduced to the gospel that includes the life-giving Spirit and the bride-producing Bridegroom. This incomplete understanding of the gospel deprives believers of a fuller comprehension and resulting experience of the life-giving Spirit's salvation in the divine life. This partial gospel also keeps believers ignorant of God's work to prepare a glorious bride for Christ. In announcing the gospel to fellow human beings, we need to herald not only the Lord's redeeming love in sacrificing Himself as our vicarious Substitute but also His saving love in imparting Himself into us to be our life. Moreover, we should also proclaim His bridal love and His desire to adorn and build us up corporately to be His counterpart.

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The proper preaching of the gospel openly portrays our crucified Redeemer, dispenses the Spirit of life, and espouses those who believe to Christ as pure virgins. May such an uplifted vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ fill us with the burden to spread this jubilant message to all who are appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48) so that they also may behold Christ as the redeeming Lamb, the life-dispensing Spirit, and the bride-adorning Bridegroom for their supreme enjoyment of Him and for His full satisfaction in His longed-for counterpart. **AF**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Christ being the center, content, and fulfillment of the Old Testament is also affirmed by the fact that in expounding the entire Old Testament, the resurrected Christ clearly explained to the disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27), declaring, "All the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms concerning Me must be fulfilled" (v. 44).

<sup>2</sup>Isaiah 53 also reveals that as the Lamb of God was dying as the vicarious Redeemer, He saw and delighted in the organic

issue of His death and resurrection. Verses 10 and 11 say, "When He makes Himself an offering for sin, / He will see a seed, He will extend His days, / And the pleasure of Jehovah will prosper in His hand. / He will see the fruit of the travail of His soul, / And He will be satisfied." While dying on the cross as an offering for sin, the Lord anticipated the result of His death and resurrection and was satisfied. The organic produce of His death and resurrection—the seed, the extension of His days, and the fruit of the travail of His soul—all refer to the church as the Body of Christ. In the New Testament we see that this Body is composed of all the believers in Christ who are produced as the many grains of wheat by the life-releasing death of Christ and by the life-imparting resurrection of Christ (John 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:45). This vision of the church as the Body of Christ built up in oneness and as the bride adorned for His delight was the satisfaction that sustained Christ on the cross (Eph. 4:16; 5:27). That vision was the joy for which He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). When Christ sees the church as the built-up Body and the prepared bride at His second coming, His satisfaction will reach its sublime peak.

<sup>3</sup>On the whole, commentators posit that John's testimony concerning Christ addresses mainly His status as the Lamb of God and the Baptizer. Hence, they miss out on the import of His status as the Bridegroom, the goal of all other statuses of Christ. For instance, Herman N. Ridderbos writes, "John's witness to Jesus reaches its climax" in John 1:29-34, where Christ is introduced mainly as the Lamb of God and the Baptizer (69). Similarly, Raymond E. Brown contends that John the Baptist's recommendation of Christ in John 1 embodies the entirety of his Christological doctrine: "In a series of profound testimonials John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God (vs. 29), as the pre-existent one (30), and as the vehicle of the Spirit (32-34). Thus, John unfolds for us here on the lips of John the Baptist a whole christology" (58). In contrast to Ridderbos and Brown, G. Campbell Morgan places a high premium on John's presentation of Christ as the Bridegroom in John 3:

No word John uttered more clearly sets forth his profound sense of the dignity and glory of Jesus than this in which he refers to Him as the Bridegroom, and sees in the gathering of the people to Him the fulfilment of the ancient suggestion that the people of Jehovah stand in relation to Him as Bride to Bridegroom. (55)

<sup>4</sup>These commentators include William Barclay (141-144), Frederic Louis Godet (408), and F. F. Bruce (95-96).

<sup>5</sup>Perhaps the strongest scriptural support for the increase of Christ in the Gospel of John is Christ's word in John 12:24, which speaks of the issue of His death in terms of the organic increase of Himself: "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Through incarnation, the eternal Word became a God-man, whose divine life was concealed and confined in the shell of His humanity. For this reason, Christ likened Himself to a single grain of wheat. Although He was surrounded by multitudes while living on earth, He stood alone as the only God-man. If Christ had not submitted Himself to the costly

process of death with His resultant resurrection, He would have remained alone, the only God-man, without a bride as His increase (cf. Gen. 2:18). However, because of His deep desire to produce a bride, Christ voluntarily laid down His human life so that His divine life could be released. Through the "breaking" of the shell of His humanity on the cross, the believers can now share in His divine life and be constituted as His organic increase and corporate counterpart. Just as one grain of wheat falls into the ground, dies, and grows up to bring forth many grains in "resurrection" as its increase, He as the singular God-man fell into the ground, died, and resurrected to bring forth many God-men as His increase. These many God-men corporately form the church as His beloved bride.

<sup>6</sup>"The antecedent of *which* is *Spirit*, not *sword*, indicating that the Spirit is the word of God. Both the Spirit and the word are Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 19:13)" (Recovery Version, Eph. 6:17, note 3).

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