

THE LIFE-RELEASING DEATH OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by David Yoon

According to the revelation of the New Testament, the death of Christ is a central landmark in God's eternal economy. Through His all-inclusive death Christ not only solved all the problems in the universe—taking away the sin of the world, destroying the devil, judging the world, crucifying the old man, and terminating the old creation—but also released the divine life from within Himself in order to fulfill God's eternal purpose, which is to impart life into His elect for the producing of His corporate expression (John 12:24; Rom. 6:4). It is hardly an overstatement to assert that the operation of God's economy of salvation centers around and hinges on the cross of Christ and that the believers' participation in God's full salvation is contingent on the application of the cross to them. Each of the four Gospels provides a detailed narrative of Christ's crucifixion in order to reveal the intrinsic import of His manifold accomplishments on the cross, yet no other verse in the four Gospels captures the full significance of Christ's death more succinctly and vividly than John 19:34: "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water."

Here blood symbolizes the redeeming aspect of Christ's death for the forgiveness of sins, and water symbolizes the life-releasing aspect of His death for the impartation of the divine life into the believers. Because of Adam's transgression, God's eternal purpose to dispense Himself as life into man for the producing of His enlarged expression in Christ could not be fulfilled apart from Christ's redemptive death. Redemption restores the believers to God's purpose, whereas the impartation of life fulfills this purpose. Although most genuine believers are familiar with the redemptive aspect of Christ's death, due to a failure in seeing the central position that the divine life occupies in the Gospel of John, not many have a proper realization of the non-redemptive, life-releasing aspect of His death. In order to grasp the central thought of the Gospel of John and to participate in the fulfillment of God's ultimate purpose, we must see that the death of Christ not only redeemed us from our sins by His blood but also released His divine life, as signified by water, in order to make us part of His organic corporate expression.

Traditional Interpretations of *Blood and Water* in John 19:34

From the church fathers in the ante-Nicene period to the present, biblical scholars have advocated many interpretations of *blood and water* in John 19:34. Many of the traditional and current interpretations present an erroneous or limited understanding of the significance of blood and water, for they miss the vital focus of the Gospel of John concerning God's intention to be life to man for His enlarged expression in the Son. Of the many interpretations of *blood and water* one of the most popular involves a sacramental component, while another popular interpretation argues that these words are merely an anti-docetic polemic on the part of John.

It is significant that blood precedes water. This indicates that the redeeming aspect of Christ's death opens the way for the life-releasing aspect. This thought is in harmony with the principle in the New Testament that God's judicial redemption lays a foundation for His organic salvation in the eternal life.

A Sacramental Interpretation of Blood and Water

Catholic commentators, including Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, as well as Protestant commentators, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, have argued for a sacramental interpretation of the double flow in John 19:34, claiming that the blood refers to the Eucharist observance (the Lord's table) and that the water refers to baptism. Even though the Lord's table is related to the blood of Christ, it is not the main referent in this portion of the Word. When the Lord's table is discussed in the New Testament, the bread is used to symbolize the Lord's body, and the product of the vine in the cup is used to symbolize His shed blood (Matt. 26:26-29). In the Gospel of John the only passage that could even remotely be interpreted as alluding to the elements of the Lord's table is 6:53-54, where the Lord speaks of the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood. In contrast, John 19:34 speaks of blood and water, not blood and flesh. This alone argues against the suggestion that *blood* in this verse is a reference to the Lord's table. Even if *blood* was a reference to the Lord's table, it would be an inadequate one because it would be associated with only the vine and not the bread. Between the two elements of the Lord's table, the bread, as a symbol of the Lord's body broken on the cross to release the divine life for the establishment of the believers as one bread (1 Cor. 10:17), is the more significant one, and even Christ's lengthy discourse in John 6 is centered on the bread, not the blood (vv. 5, 7, 23, 26, 31-35, 41, 48, 50-51, 58). Hence, *blood* in 19:34 should not be regarded as a reference to the Lord's table.

In response to a sacramental interpretation of John 19:34, particularly in its treatment of the blood, a number of commentators have presented convincing arguments that the blood does not allude to the Lord's table but instead to Christ's redemptive work. In *Seeing Blood and Water: A Narrative-critical Study of John 19:34*, Sebastian A. Carnazzo takes issue with a sacramental interpretation by pointing out the sequence of these two signs:

If an allusion to the sacraments was intended, where the water is representative of baptism and the blood is representative of Eucharist, shouldn't the text say that "water and blood" flowed out, not "blood and water"? Initiatory baptism would have certainly preceded participation in the eucharistic meal in the experience of the intended audience, and it is reasonable to expect that this order would be reflected in John 19:34, if it was indeed intended as an allusion to these sacraments. (78)

It is significant that blood precedes water. This indicates that the redeeming aspect of Christ's death opens the way for the life-releasing aspect, the latter being predicated upon the former. This thought is in harmony with the principle in the New Testament that God's judicial redemption lays a foundation for His organic salvation, that is, salvation in the eternal life (Rom. 5:10).

The preponderance of evidence in the Gospel of John particularly and in the Bible as a whole suggests that *water* in John 19:34 refers to the divine life of Christ that was released through His death for the believers' regeneration and continued salvation in life (Rom. 5:10), not to the water of baptism. In the Bible water symbolizes mainly either life (Psa. 36:8; Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1) or death (Gen. 1:2; 7:17-24; Exo. 14:21-30; Rom. 6:3). Both of these aspects—germination and termination—can be found in the Gospel of John. In the first three chapters of this Gospel, water refers primarily to death (2:7, 9), or baptism, which terminates the elements of the old creation in redeemed humanity (1:26, 31, 33; 3:5, 23). The significance of water as a terminating factor is most clearly implied in the Lord's words concerning regeneration in John 3:5: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In this verse *water* refers to baptism, which involves termination by burial. This thought is indicated in the ministry of John the Baptist, who "came

baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).

When John “saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism,” he said to them, “Offspring of vipers, who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath?” (Matt. 3:7). According to John’s speaking, fallen human beings are vipers with a serpentine nature in need of termination. When people repented through John’s preaching, he baptized them unto repentance, immersing them into the water of death to bury them and their serpentine nature so that they could be raised by Christ in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, through regeneration by the divine life (v. 6, 11; Rom. 8:2). In John 3:5, a verse that speaks of regeneration, *water* (a terminating factor) is paired with *Spirit* (a germinating factor). Regeneration involves both termination through the death-water of baptism and germination through the Spirit who gives life (6:63). This indicates that in the Gospel of John the water of baptism denotes the water of death, which functions mainly to terminate and bury our old, fallen being.

The first three chapters of the Gospel of John emphasize primarily water in relation to termination. In the remaining chapters, however, water refers primarily to the life of God that is imparted into the believers through Christ’s death and resurrection for their life supply (4:10-11, 13-15, 46; 7:38; 13:5). The governing principle for interpreting the entire Gospel of John is God’s intention to impart Himself as life into the believers. Therefore, in the climactic account of Christ’s death in the Gospel of John, the water that issued from the Lord’s pierced side should be interpreted not as the terminating water of baptism but as the flowing life of God released through Christ’s death for the believers’ enjoyment.

An Anti-docetic Interpretation of Blood and Water

Another commonly held interpretation of John 19:34 is that John spoke of blood and water, following the thrusting of the soldier’s spear, primarily to advance an anti-docetic polemic by providing definitive evidence of Christ’s genuine humanity. According to this interpretation, the double flow from Christ’s pierced side is “undebatable proof that He actually died” (Ryrie 1720) and that He was a genuine human being who possessed a real, mortal human body. Regarding *blood and water* as nothing more than a confirmation of Christ’s genuine humanity places too much emphasis on John’s response to the two ancient heresies of Gnosticism and Docetism. Gnosticism is based on the notion that the human body, being material, is inherently corrupt and evil. Consequently, God, who is pure, could not have become a man, assuming a physical body through incarnation. Docetism, with its underlying basis in Gnosticism, holds that Christ did not come in the flesh but was merely a phantasm. Against the backdrop of these heretical teachings, this apologetic interpretation of blood and water has some merit, since John wrote his Gospel and Epistles partly to negate the heresies of Gnosticism and Docetism, declaring that the Word became flesh and that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3).

This interpretation has led many commentators to ignore the deeper symbolic significance of the double flow from the side of the crucified Christ. In *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Gospel*, Albert Barnes denies a symbolic interpretation of the blood and water and speaks of the outflow of blood and water as being “strictly a natural result, adduced by John to establish *one* fact on which the whole of Christianity turns—that he was truly dead” (386). In Barnes’s view, it was important to confront the Gnostics, who denied “the reality of the death of Jesus” and who “maintained that he died *in appearance only*” (386). Similarly, in the *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: John*, Robert Kysar contends that although the emergence of blood and water spoken of in John 19:34 may have a secondary theological, metaphorical

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significance, “the primary point to be established by this verse is the reality of Jesus’ death” (291-292). Such a notion ignores the symbolic character of the Gospel of John, an oversight that causes the readers to miss the book’s primary message. Much like John’s Revelation, in which the revelation of Jesus Christ is made known by signs, symbols with spiritual significance (1:1), John’s Gospel is also a book of signs, and the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus are explicitly referred to as such, symbolizing matters of life (2:23; 4:54; 20:30).

In particular, John 20:30-31 says that the entire book is composed of signs that “Jesus did before His disciples” and that John wrote of them so that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name.” These verses clearly indicate that the signs in the Gospel of John were recorded so that the believers would believe in order to participate in the divine life. Although the blood and water in 19:34 were actual physical substances and indeed prove the genuineness of Christ’s humanity because of His death, *blood and water* should be interpreted principally to refer to signs concerning the two aspects of God’s full salvation: redemption and the impartation of life. The principal goal of John’s Gospel is far beyond a mere refutation of Gnostic and Docetic heresies; its primary purpose is to reveal God’s economy of salvation to redeem the believers and impart eternal life into them for the producing of His expanded expression in Christ.¹

Water—a Sign of the Flowing Eternal Life of God

Most commentators who embrace a symbolic interpretation of *blood and water* agree that blood is a sign of the redemptive death of Christ. However, there is considerable disagreement among them concerning the symbolic meaning of water. Many scholars understand water as a sign of sanctification in terms of purification and cleansing. In *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, Craig R. Koester, commenting on “the revelatory significance of the water” (181) in verse 34, associates water in this verse with the Jewish ablutions in 2:1-11 and foot-washing in 13:1-13, claiming that “the water helps to convey the cleansing effect of Jesus’ death” (182). Koester posits that “water should be connected, although not equated, with the Spirit” and that “the water cannot fully be identified with the Spirit” (181).

In the Gospel of John water is certainly associated with washing and sanctification. Strictly speaking, however, water in this Gospel denotes more than just an objective washing and sanctification; it also denotes a subjective regeneration and washing in the divine life that was released through Christ’s death and dispensed into the believers through His resurrection as the life-giving Spirit (Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Cor. 15:45; Titus 3:5). Reading John in this more positive, pneumatological sense accords with the conclusion of Kevin J. Vanhoozer, who writes that the narration of the double flow in John 19:34 is the evangelist’s way of “assuring his readers that the new life of the Holy Spirit flows from the slain body of Jesus” (22).

The water in John 19:34 should be interpreted in light of the Lord’s words in 7:37-38: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” In verse 39 John explains the significance of this living water: “But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” John’s editorial remark in verse 39 makes it clear that the water that would flow out of the believers is equivalent to the flowing out of the Spirit; hence, the water that flowed out of the Lord’s side surely also symbolizes the Spirit of the glorified Jesus whom the believers would receive.

The Lord Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:13), and in His resurrection He, as the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor.

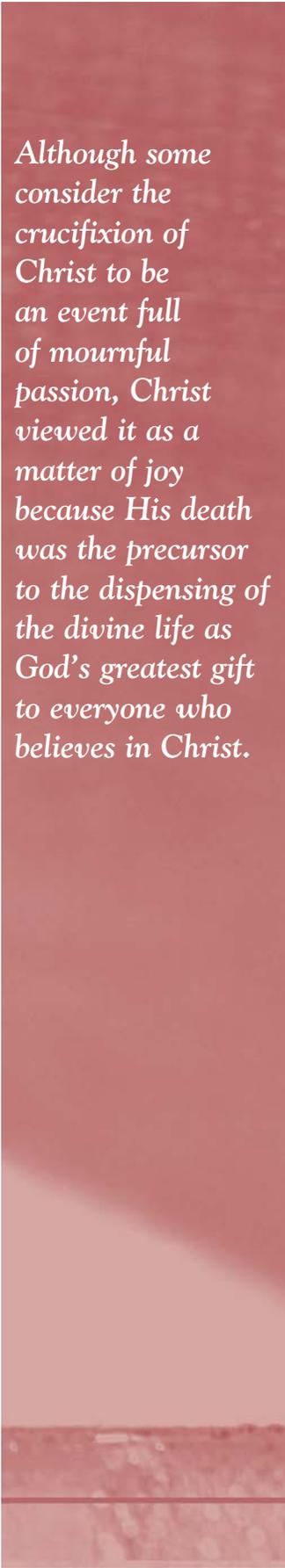
15:45). Hence, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus as living water is the resurrected and glorified Jesus as the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). According to John 1:12, those who believe into the name of the Lord Jesus receive Him, and according to 7:37-39, those who believe into the Lord receive the Spirit. This indicates that receiving the Lord, who is life and in whom is life (14:6; 1:4), is tantamount to receiving the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, who is “the Spirit who gives life” (6:63). Therefore, *water* in 7:38 and 19:34 speaks of the dispensing of Christ as the life-giving Spirit and of the believers’ partaking of the eternal life released through Christ’s death on the cross and imparted into them through His resurrection as the life-giving Spirit.

This thought is confirmed by the Lord’s words in John 4:14, which again connect water with eternal life: “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life.” In verse 10 the Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” This suggests that the gift of God is the living water, which becomes in the believers a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. God gave His only begotten Son, who is the divine life, so that by believing into Him and being joined to Him, we would have Him as eternal life (3:16; 1 Cor. 6:17).

This eternal life is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23), also called “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38), who is “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2). Hence, living water as the precious gift of God in us is the eternal life embodied in Christ, released through His death, and dispensed into us as the Spirit of life. Although some consider the crucifixion of Christ to be an event full of mournful passion—in which our sinless Savior suffered man’s intense persecution and mockery and even God’s righteous judgment on behalf of fallen humankind—Christ viewed it as a matter of joy because His death was the precursor to the dispensing of the divine life as God’s greatest gift to everyone who believes in Christ (Heb. 12:2).

The water that flowed out of the pierced side of the crucified Christ is typified by the water that flowed out of the smitten rock, just as the blood from His side is typified by the blood of the passover lamb (Exo. 12:7, 22; Rev. 12:11). In his Gospel John makes frequent allusions to types from the book of Exodus, such as the tabernacle and the offerings, to illustrate spiritual realities in God’s New Testament economy (1:14, 29). In Exodus 17:6-7 Jehovah instructed Moses to strike the rock with his staff so that water would come forth for the Israelites to drink. In this portion of the Word Moses signifies the law, and his staff represents the power and authority of the law. According to 1 Corinthians 10:4, “the rock was Christ,” and out from this “spiritual rock” flowed water as a type of “spiritual drink.” Through His incarnation Christ came to the earth as a living, spiritual rock. In His crucifixion Christ was smitten, judged, by the authority of God’s righteous law in order to accomplish redemption so that the water of life, Christ as the life-giving Spirit, could flow out of the crucified Christ in order to be “spiritual drink” to God’s people.

Witness Lee juxtaposes Exodus 17:6-7 with John 7:38, pointing out that while the former speaks of water flowing out of a single rock to quench people’s thirst, the latter reveals living water flowing out of the believers as many “small rocks” to quench the thirst of others (*Ultimate* 76). When we drink of the Spirit as the water of life, we become “small rocks” out of which flow rivers of living water, which is Christ as the life-giving Spirit. In Numbers 20:8-11 Jehovah commanded Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock so that the rock might yield its water. In our experience, “to take the rod is to identify with Christ in His death and apply the death of Christ to ourselves and our situation” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 8, note 1). This indicates that in order for the Spirit of life to flow out of our innermost being as rivers of living water to supply



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others, we should not only be filled with the Spirit by drinking of Him as the water of life but also live a crucified life by being conformed to His death, allowing the Spirit to apply the all-terminating cross of Christ to the depths of our being (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:4; 8:13). Although we cannot share in Christ's redemptive death, we have the glorious privilege to participate in His life-releasing death so that we may flow out eternal life to thirsty souls (2 Cor. 3:6; 1 John 5:16).

The water that flowed out of Christ on the cross also corresponds to the river of water of life that proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 22:1). In eternity future, when Satan, the source of sin, is cast into the lake of fire, the blood of the Lamb will have effectively cleansed the believers from all their sins (20:10; Ezek. 28:16). Thus, the throne in the New Jerusalem is called the throne of God and of the Lamb, the Redeemer. This indicates that the eternal redemption accomplished by Christ as the redeeming Lamb through the shedding of His precious blood will be an eternal memorial and guarantee of the unshakable judicial base of our salvation (Heb. 9:12). Because of the blood of the Lamb, we can enjoy the dispensing of the divine life as a river of water of life that flows from the throne. In eternity we will forever need to drink of the river of water of life in continual dependence on the Triune God as our life supply. Our deep enjoyment in eternity will consist of continually receiving the divine life of Christ Himself as living water, under the effectual covering of His blood. This points to the impartation of life as the goal of redemption in God's eternal economy in the writings of John.

The Impartation of Life—the Central Thought in the Gospel of John

The impartation of life is the central thought in the Gospel of John. For this reason, the life-releasing aspect of Christ's death as revealed in this Gospel is primary, and the redemptive aspect, though indispensable, is secondary. The Gospel of John is a book of eternal life and is intended to bring the believers into the enjoyment of this life. It opens with a proclamation that in Christ, as the eternal Word, was life (1:4), and it closes by declaring that this Gospel was written so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, we may have eternal life in His name (20:31). If we would have a proper understanding of *eternal life* as mentioned in this Gospel, we need to realize that three distinct Greek words for *life* are used in the New Testament: *bios* (βίος), *psuche* (ψυχή), and *zoe* (ζωή). *Bios* refers to our physical life (Luke 8:14), *psuche* denotes our psychological or soulish life (Matt. 16:25-26), and *zoe* designates the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God (John 3:15-16; Heb. 7:16). According to the New Testament revelation, *eternal life* does not refer to an everlasting existence in a future state of delight but to the eternally living Triune God as life—God Himself embodied in Christ and imparted as the Spirit into the believers for both their present and future enjoyment (Eph. 4:18; 1 John 5:20).

In His eternal existence the Triune God is a being of life. Each of the three of the Trinity is intrinsically related to life. The Father, the source of life, "has life in Himself" (John 5:26); the Father "gave to the Son to also have life in Himself" (v. 26) making the Son the embodiment of life—the One in whom is life and who is life (1:4; 14:6); and the Spirit, the essence of life, is "the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), the Spirit who is life. Furthermore, in the divine economy to dispense life into man, all three of the Godhead give life. The Father, the origin of life, raises the dead by giving them life (John 5:21) and loves humanity so much that He gives His eternal life (3:16). The will of the Father is that everyone who beholds the Son and believes into Him should have eternal life (6:40), and the Father gave the Son authority over all flesh to give eternal life (17:2). The Son, the expression of life, gives His sheep eternal life (10:27-28) and "gives life to whom He wills" (5:21). And the Spirit, the transmission of life, is "the Spirit who gives life" (6:63).

In light of the Triune God's intention and operation to give life to man, all of the Son's declarations and activities in the Gospel of John should be understood as being aimed toward His becoming life to His believers. The Son declared that the express purpose of His incarnation was to give the believers the eternal life of God in its abundance: "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (10:10). The desire of God's heart is that the divine life, which is in the Son and is even the Son Himself, may be in the believers richly until this life spreads into every part of their tripartite being (6:53; Rom. 8:6, 10-11). In accordance with this desire, the Son presented Himself to the crowds as "the bread of life" in order to give them "the food which abides unto eternal life" so that they might eat Him and have life in themselves (6:27, 48, 53, 57). He also offered Himself as living water to thirsty people so that if they would drink of Him, He would become in them not only a fountain of water springing up into eternal life but also rivers of living water flowing out of their innermost being (4:14; 7:38).

In order to dispense Himself as life in the form of spiritual food and drink, the Son passed through death to accomplish redemption and release the divine life to the believers, and He rose from the dead to become the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of reality (14:17; 20:22). Today, if sinners repent of their sins and believe into the Son, the embodiment of life, and receive Him into them, they will not perish or come into judgment but will have eternal life and be begotten as children of God, thereby passing out of death into life (1:12-13; 3:15-16; 5:24). As they continue to come to the Lord as the life-giving Spirit and receive His words of eternal life, eating Him as the bread of life and drinking of Him as living water, they will have the eternal life abundantly, becoming saturated with this life in their tripartite being (v. 40; 6:63, 68). Given the Gospel of John's pervasive statements concerning the Triune God's desire to give His divine life to those who believe, it is reasonable to expect that the death of Christ would be presented not only from a judicial perspective but even more from an organic perspective related to the release of His life, as symbolized by the water that flowed from His side.

Witness Lee elucidates the distinction between the record of the Lord's death in the synoptic Gospels and that in the Gospel of John, underscoring the point that whereas the former reveals only the redemptive aspect of the Lord's death, the latter reveals both the redemptive and life-releasing aspects:

The record of the other three Gospels portrays only the redemptive aspect of the Lord's death; John's record portrays not only the redemptive aspect but also the life-imparting aspect. In Matt. 27:45, 51, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44-45, darkness, a symbol of sin, appeared, and the veil of the temple, which separated man from God, was rent. These signs are related to the redemptive aspect of the Lord's death. The words spoken by the Lord on the cross in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them," and in Matt. 27:46, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (because He bore our sin at that time), also depict the redemptive aspect of His death. But the flowing water and the unbroken bone mentioned by John in [19:]34 and 36 are signs that relate to the life-imparting aspect of the Lord's death. (Recovery Version, John 19:34, note 1)

Among the four Gospels, only the Gospel of John records that water flowed from Christ's side on the cross. Similarly, only John describes the meeting between Christ and His disciples on the evening of His resurrection during which He showed them both His nail-pierced hands and His spear-pierced side (20:20). Further, only John writes that in a later meeting with the disciples, Christ asked Thomas not only to put his finger into the marks in His hands but also to put his hand into His side (vv. 25, 27). The uniqueness of the record in the Gospel of John concerning the Lord's opened side not only reinforces the vital importance of the flowing water as a sign of the release of the divine life but also supports the governing theme of this Gospel—the impartation of the divine life.

*Today,
if sinners repent
of their sins
and believe into
the Son, the
embodiment of life,
and receive Him
into them, they
will not perish
or come into
judgment but will
have eternal life
and be begotten as
children of God,
thereby passing out
of death into life.*

Judicial redemption and organic salvation are not for individualistic experience but for God's corporate expression. The redemptive aspect is for purchasing the church, and the life-releasing aspect is for producing and building up the church.

According to the Gospel of John, blood, signifying judicial redemption, and water, signifying salvation in life, deal with the two problems of fallen humankind: sin and death (1:29; 5:24; 8:34; 9:34, 41; cf. Rom. 8:2). Through the fall of Adam, human beings not only possess a sinful nature and commit sinful deeds but also have become dead in their offenses and are destined to die in their sins (7:17; John 8:24; Eph. 2:1). The blood from the Lord's side issued in a "fountain" of blood "for sin and for impurity" to deal with sins (Zech. 13:1), and the water issued in a "fountain of life" to deal with death and to dispense God as life into the believers (Psa. 36:9; Rev. 21:6). The redemptive aspect of the Lord's death saves us from the guilt, condemnation, and punishment of sin, whereas the life-releasing aspect of His death saves us from the power, slavery, and reign of sin. God's redemption, signified by blood, cleanses the believers, who are earthen vessels, from sins, and God's organic salvation, signified by water, dispenses the Triune God as life, the excellent treasure, into these vessels (1 John 1:7; 2 Cor. 4:7). The Gospel of John reveals that God's full salvation is much more than a reversal of the negative consequences of Adam's fall; ultimately, it is a fulfillment of the positive goal of God's eternal purpose to impart Himself as life for the producing of His enlarged expression in Christ.

Christ's Life-releasing Death Typified by Adam's Sleep to Produce His Counterpart

Ultimately, the believers' participation in judicial redemption and organic salvation is not for their individualistic spiritual experience but for the Triune God's corporate expression in the church. The redemptive aspect of Christ's death, signified by the blood, is for the purchasing of the church (Acts 20:28), and the life-releasing aspect, signified by the water, is for the producing and building up of the church (Eph. 5:26, 29-30). Christ's pierced side was prefigured by Adam's opened side, out from which his wife, Eve, was produced (Gen. 2:21-23). According to Romans 5:14, Adam was "a type of Him who was to come," that is, a type of Christ, who is also called the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Similarly, Ephesians 5:31-32, alluding to Genesis 2:24, indicates that Adam and Eve becoming one flesh typify Christ and the church as a mysterious, universal couple.

In Genesis 2:18 Jehovah God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." Witness Lee comments on the parallels between God and Adam, writing that "Adam...typifies God in Christ as the real, universal Husband, who is seeking a wife for Himself" (cf. Isa. 54:5; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:9) and that "Adam's need for a wife typifies and portrays God's need, in His economy, to have a wife as His complement" (Recovery Version, Gen. 2:18, note 1). Adam named all the animals, but none of the animals matched him as his counterpart—"a helping being, in which, as soon as he sees it, he may recognise himself" (Keil 86). This is because none of them had the same life, nature, and expression as Adam, showing that nothing in the old creation (including the man created in God's image and after His likeness yet devoid of His life and nature) is qualified to match Christ as His counterpart, because the old creation does not share Christ's divine life, nature, and expression.

In order to produce a counterpart for Adam, God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, opened his side, took out one of his ribs, and built the rib into a woman (vv. 21-22). God's causing Adam to fall asleep in order to produce Eve as his counterpart typifies Christ's non-redemptive, life-imparting death on the cross, which was ordained according to the determined counsel of God for the producing of the church as His bride (Matt. 26:42; Acts 2:23; Eph. 5:25-27; cf. John 11:11-14; 1 Thes. 4:13-16).² The rib taken from Adam's opened side typifies the indestructible, eternal life of Christ, which flowed out of His pierced side so that His believers might receive His life for the producing and building up of the church as His counterpart.

The rib from Adam's side in Genesis 2 corresponds to Christ's unbroken bone in John 19:36. At the end of Christ's crucifixion, the Jews, who did not wish for any bodies to remain on the cross during their holy Passover Sabbath, requested of Pilate that the legs of those who had been crucified be broken in order to hasten their death (v. 31). The two thieves who had been crucified with Christ had not yet died, and as a result, their bones were broken by the soldiers (v. 32). But when the soldiers came to the Lord Jesus, they discovered that He had already died and that there was no need for them to break His bones (v. 33). This took place under God's sovereignty in order to fulfill the Old Testament Scripture that says, "No bone of His shall be broken" (v. 36). Specifically, it fulfilled Exodus 12:46, in which the children of Israel were instructed to not break any of the bones of the passover lamb, and Psalm 34:20, which prophecies concerning the crucified Messiah: "He keeps all his bones; / Not one of them is broken."

The unbroken bone of the Lord signifies His unbreakable eternal life. Whereas the Lord's body, which signifies His human life, was broken (Matt. 26:26), His bone, which signifies His divine life, could never be broken. The Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders could conspire to nail the Lord to the cross and put Him to death, but they could not break His eternal life. Although the Lord died as a genuine, mortal man, the divine life within this God-man, the resurrection life, remained unbroken and undamaged, proving this life to be eternal and indestructible (John 11:25). All other lives are breakable; only the eternal life of Christ is unbreakable. The rib taken out of Adam in Genesis 2:21 corresponds to the water and unbroken bone in John 19:31-36 and typifies the indestructible eternal life of Christ, which was released from within Him as water through His death and imparted into the believers as water for the constitution of the church to be His counterpart.

In contrast to John 19:34, in which both blood and water issued from Christ's pierced side, the only thing that came out of Adam's opened side in Genesis 2 was the rib from which Eve was built. Blood is not mentioned in Genesis 2, because at that time there was no need for redemption. Sin, the satanic element of corruption, had not yet entered into man. Thus, Adam was put to sleep not for Eve's redemption but solely for her creation. Just as Adam's rib, not his blood, was the unique element with which Eve was built, so also Christ's life, not His blood, is the unique element for building the church as His counterpart. The building of Adam's rib into a woman signifies the process of God's salvation in life through which the believers, who receive the divine life, are regenerated, renewed, sanctified, transformed, conformed, and built up to be the church as the Body of Christ, which is the bride of Christ (Rom. 5:10; 6:22; 8:29; 12:2-5).

After building the rib into a woman, Jehovah brought her to Adam. When Adam awoke from his deep sleep and beheld his long-sought counterpart, he exclaimed, "This time this is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh; / This one shall be called Woman / Because out of Man this one was taken" (Gen. 2:23). Eve was worthy to be Adam's counterpart because she was taken entirely out of him, having Adam as her unique source and element and thus possessing his life, nature, and image. Similarly, the church is qualified to be Christ's counterpart because she is a pure product of Christ, having Christ as her unique source and element and thus possessing His life, nature, and image (Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; 2 Cor. 3:18). Because Eve was the same as Adam in life and nature, she could be joined to Adam to be one flesh with him (Gen. 2:24) and was even identified with Adam to the point that God referred to the two of them—male and female—as Adam (5:2). In the same principle, because the church is the same as Christ is in life and nature but not in His Godhead or as an object of worship, she can be joined to Him to be one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17) and even identified with Him to the point that Paul speaks of Christ, the Head, and the church, His Body, together as "the Christ," the corporate Christ (12:12). Just as Eve, who was built with Adam's

Adam was put to sleep not for Eve's redemption but solely for her creation. Just as Adam's rib, not his blood, was the unique element with which Eve was built, so also Christ's life, not His blood, is the unique element for building the church as His counterpart.

The church is not simply the totality of all the believers; more significantly, she is the aggregate of the eternal life of Christ that has been wrought into the believers. Therefore, the building up of the church depends upon the dispensing of the divine life.

rib, was Adam's reproduction and increase, so also the church, which is built with Christ's resurrection life, is Christ's reproduction and increase.

When the church as the bride of Christ is fully built and presented to Him at the marriage dinner of the Lamb, He will recognize her as a corporate duplication of Himself—bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. This thought matches the revelation in John 3:29-30, which identifies the bride of Christ as His increase: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom...He must increase." If Christ is to increase, He needs a bride, a living composition of all the regenerated believers (v. 6). The church as the bride of Christ is produced by the believers' regeneration, through which they are born of the life-giving Spirit by receiving the divine life (vv. 3, 5-6). Moreover, she is completely built, sanctified, and adorned for her Husband by the believers' continual receiving of the divine life into their tripartite being as Christ gives them the life-giving Spirit not by measure by speaking to them the words of God, the words of eternal life (v. 34; 6:63; cf. Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2). The church as the bride of Christ is not simply the totality of all the believers; more significantly, she is the aggregate of the eternal life of Christ that has been wrought into the believers. Therefore, the building up of the church as the beloved bride of Christ and as His organic increase depends upon the dispensing of the divine life as living water, which was released through His death on the cross.

Christ's Life-releasing Death Signified by a Grain of Wheat Falling into the Ground to Produce Many Grains

The revelation concerning the life-releasing aspect of Christ's death, as typified by the water that flowed from His side, is further confirmed by Christ's speaking of Himself as a grain of wheat in John 12:23-24: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Here, in anticipation of His impending death, Christ prophesied that He would be glorified by dying as a grain of wheat in order to bring forth the believers as many grains in resurrection. Christ likened Himself to a grain of wheat, a container of life. Through incarnation the Son of God, who is the embodiment of the divine life, was clothed with the shell of humanity, thereby becoming a God-man within whom the unlimited, infinite, eternal life of God was concealed and confined. Through His death on the cross, the shell of His humanity was broken, and the divine life was released from within Him so that in His resurrection this life could be imparted into the believers for His glorification.

Since a seed has no blood, Christ's falling into the earth as a grain of wheat does not refer to His work of redemption but to His reproduction through the release of the divine life. Just as a grain of wheat is "glorified" by bringing forth many grains, so also Christ, the unique God-man, is glorified by producing the believers as many God-men through His life-releasing death and life-imparting resurrection. During Christ's final, triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Greeks were seeking an audience with Him, and a great crowd of the Jews welcomed Him with praises, causing the Pharisees to say, lamenting, "Behold, the world has gone after Him" (vv. 12-21). However, instead of accepting the exaltation of the crowd and being glorified by man, Christ spoke of His being sown into the earth as a grain of wheat so that through His multiplication He might be glorified by the Father for the sake of the Father's glorification (v. 28; 13:31-32; 17:1).

While living on earth, the incarnate Christ was often thronged by multitudes, but in a sense, as the unique God-man, the unique embodiment of the divine life, He was always alone, for none of the people had the divine life within them. If Christ had not undergone the process of His life-releasing death and life-imparting resurrection, He would have remained alone as the only God-man and could not have produced

the many God-men needed to be His increase to constitute His bride (cf. Gen. 2:18). However, because of His profound yearning to produce His bride, Christ passed through death as a grain of wheat to release the divine life and entered into resurrection to be the life-giving Spirit to dispense this life into the believers. Just as Eve, typifying the church as the bride of Christ, was the reproduction of Adam, typifying Christ, so also the believers as the many grains of wheat are the duplication of Christ as the single, original grain, having the same life, nature, and expression as Christ. As Augustine said, “The death of Christ was the death of the most fertile grain of wheat” (qtd. in Lenski 863), for today the resurrected Christ no longer abides alone, having gained His counterpart composed of the regenerated believers as His mass reproduction.

As the many grains of wheat produced through Christ’s death and resurrection, the believers are broken and blended to form one loaf, which signifies the unique Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). In the Gospel of John the corporate produce of Christ’s life-releasing death and life-dispensing resurrection is the church as the organic Body of Christ. Through Christ’s redeeming and life-releasing death and in His life-imparting resurrection, the believers received the divine life and were thereby made alive and raised up together with Christ so that they might become the church as the Body of Christ, the unique expression of Christ composed of the many grains. In the Gospel of John the unique issue of the life-releasing death of Christ as the grain of wheat is the church as the organic Body of Christ.³

In John 12 the Lord Jesus not only spoke concerning the necessity and issue of His life-releasing death but also issued a call for the believers to participate in this aspect of His death. Immediately after speaking concerning His death as a grain of wheat in verse 24, the Lord said, “He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (vv. 25-26). These verses indicate that the principle of bearing fruit through Christ’s life-releasing death as a grain of wheat applies not only to the Lord but also to the believers.

In order for us to truly serve the Lord, we need to follow Him into the ground and die. Just as the Lord hated His soul-life and remained under the shadow of the cross throughout His earthly sojourn, we also should deny our soul-life and take the way of the cross throughout our Christian life. As the multiplication of Christ, we, the believers in Christ, are grains of wheat, seeds of the divine life, containing Christ as life within the shell of our outer man (2 Cor. 4:16). It is only by the breaking of our outer man that Christ as the divine life can be released. If we allow the cross to break our outer man, Christ as the divine life within our spirit will be imparted into others for the increase of Christ within them so that we may bear them as fruit for the glorification of the Son and of the Father (John 15:8).

Watchman Nee, commenting on the grain of wheat in John 12:24, points out that the expression *if it dies* “indicates that there is the possibility of not dying” because of one’s unwillingness to die and that “whenever and wherever we resist the Lord’s breaking, we will be put aside by the Lord” (161). The Lord as a grain of wheat was willing to undergo a life-releasing death because He denied His soul-life and loved the believers. But many believers as grains of wheat are unable to participate in His life-releasing death due to their love for their soul-life. The true measure of our usefulness to the Lord as His slaves is largely determined by our willingness to deny our soul-life so that we may share in His life-releasing death for the ministering of life to others.

Just as the Lord Jesus denied His soul-life and laid it down for us in order to dispense the divine life into us, we also, as His reproduction, should aspire to be overcoming



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out of His great
love for us, laid
down His soul-life
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the eternal life
into us, we also,
out of our love
for the brothers,
should lay down
our soul-life in
order to minister
the eternal life to
our brothers for
the building up of
the Body in love.*

believers who do not love their soul-life, even unto death, in order to dispense the divine life into others (Rev. 12:11; 1 John 5:16). Although all genuine believers possess the divine life, few truly know what it means to have this life in abundance within their tripartite being and to dispense it into others for their participation and growth in this life. This tragic shortage of the experience and growth of the eternal life among the believers is due to the fact that, having been distracted by sinful things or even spiritual things, such as power, signs, wonders, and miraculous gifts, they have not experienced the life-imparting death of Christ to the degree required to minister life to one another. We need to enjoy the incarnated and crucified Christ as the grain of wheat by accepting the breaking of the cross, allowing the cross to operate in us, and participating in His life-releasing death in order to impart the divine life into one another for the multiplication and expression of Christ.⁴

The Gospel of John reveals that just as the Lord's life-releasing death as a grain of wheat was motivated by His love for the believers, so also the believers' participation in this aspect of His death should be motivated by their love for one another. The life-releasing death of the grain of wheat in John 12:24 corresponds to the death of the good Shepherd in John 10. In 10:28 the Lord spoke concerning giving life to the believers as His sheep: "I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever." In verse 10 the Lord also expressed His intention to impart the divine life into the believers—"I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly"—indicating that the goal of His becoming a man and coming to humanity was for the believers as His sheep to have the zoe life, the eternal life. In the very next verse the Lord indicated that the impartation of the divine life into the believers required Him to deliver up His human life for them: "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (v. 11). As the Son of God, the Lord has the zoe life, the divine life; as the Son of Man, a genuine human being, He has the psuche life, the human life, which in His case has not been defiled with the element of sin.

In order for the divine life to be released from within Him to His sheep, the Lord needed to give up His human life. Elsewhere in the Gospel of John the Lord spoke of one laying down his life for his friends as the greatest evidence of his love for them: "No one has greater love than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (15:13). In this Gospel the Lord not only declared that He loved the disciples (11:5; 13:23; 15:9) but also exhorted them to love one another even as He loved them (13:34-35; 15:12, 17). This thought is in keeping with John's assertion that our love for fellow believers should cause us to lay down our lives for them: "In this we know love, that He laid down His life on our behalf, and we ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers" (1 John 3:16). Because the Lord loved His believers to the uttermost (John 13:1), He sacrificed His psuche life, His human life, in order to accomplish redemption for His sheep, shedding His precious blood and releasing His divine life, so that in resurrection they could share His zoe life, His eternal life, and thereby be formed as the one flock of God under the Lord as the one Shepherd, that is, the one Body of Christ under Him as the unique Head (10:16). Just as the Lord, out of His great love for us, laid down His soul-life in order to dispense the eternal life into us, we also, out of our love for the brothers, should lay down our soul-life in order to minister the eternal life to our brothers for the building up of the Body in love (Eph. 4:16).⁵

Conclusion

Although Christ's death has been traditionally understood to be mainly an act of redemption, the Gospel of John reveals that the primary purpose of His death was to release the divine life. Not only blood but also water flowed from the Lord's side when He was pierced on the cross, signifying that there is both a redemptive and a life-releasing aspect to His all-inclusive death. Although redemption serves as the indispensable judicial base for God's full salvation, it is the life of Christ released

through His death that fulfills God's eternal purpose, which is to gain an increase of Christ that matches Him in life, nature, and expression, an increase that is His corporate counterpart for eternity. Just as Adam was put to sleep in order to produce his counterpart, Eve, from the bone that was taken from his opened side, so also Christ died on the cross primarily to produce the church as His bride by dispensing the divine life, signified by the water that flowed from His wounded side, into us. Furthermore, just as a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, only to rise up again in resurrection, bearing much fruit, so also Christ's life-generating death brought forth the believers as many grains, who could be blended together to form one loaf—the one Body of Christ composed of many members. The Lord issued a call to His believers to follow Him into the ground, to participate in the non-redemptive, life-releasing aspect of His death, so that they too could share in the ministry of life to other believers for the multiplication of Christ. In order to cooperate with the Lord's work to prepare His bride and build up His Body, we should not only appreciate Christ's redemptive death but also enjoy the issue of His life-releasing death by continually experiencing the dispensing of the divine life and even participating in this life-releasing death by dying to our soul-life in order to minister the eternal life of God into others. **AFC**

Notes

¹In 19:33 John explicitly says that the soldiers saw that the Lord Jesus “had already died.” If this verse had been only part of an anti-docetic polemic, these words alone would have been sufficient to affirm that Jesus was a genuine man who had truly died, and there would have been no need to speak of blood and water flowing out of the Lord's pierced side.

²The parallel between the formation of Eve and the formation of the church—the former as the issue of Adam's sleep and the latter as the issue of Christ's death—is noted by Augustine: “Adam sleeps, that Eve may be formed; Christ dies, that the Church may be formed. When Adam sleeps, Eve is formed from his side; when Christ is dead, the spear pierces His side, that the mysteries may flow forth whereby the Church is formed” (134).

³Isaiah 53 reveals that while the Lord Jesus was dying as the vicarious Redeemer, He saw and delighted in His mystical Body as the fruit of His life-releasing death and His life-imparting 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.” Here 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 composed of all the believers in Christ who were produced as the many grains of wheat through His death as the grain of wheat and in His resurrection as the life-giving Spirit. While dying on the cross as an offering for sin, Christ anticipated the bountiful fruit of His generating death and was satisfied in knowing that through His life-releasing death and in His life-dispensing resurrection, He would fulfill the good pleasure of God to have His corporate expression in the Body of Christ.

⁴Shortly after revealing His life-releasing and life-multiplying death as a grain of wheat in John 12:24, the Lord further unveiled the produce of His death on the cross: “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. But He said this signifying by what kind of death He was about to die” (vv. 32-33). Just as the Lord produced the many grains by falling into the ground to die, so also He drew all of God's chosen people to Himself by being lifted up on the tree. “The many grains produced by His falling into the ground are the ‘all men’ drawn by His being lifted up on the tree” (Recovery Version, v. 32, note 1). It is through His redemptive and life-releasing death that the Lord draws people to Himself. Similarly, if we are conformed to the all-inclusive death of Christ (Phil. 3:10), thus experiencing Christ in His life-releasing death, “we will be a magnet drawing others to Christ,” for the divine life will be released from within us and imparted into others and thereby multiplied (Lee, *Conclusion* 3509).

⁵As demonstrated by Peter's failure to keep his word that he would lay down his life for the Lord (John 13:37-38), in ourselves and apart from His grace, we cannot lay down our life for

Although redemption serves as the indispensable judicial base for God's full salvation, it is the life of Christ released through His death that fulfills God's eternal purpose to gain an increase of Christ that matches Him in life, nature, and expression.

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the sake of the Lord or for our fellow believers. However, because we are in the Lord and are joined to Him as one spirit (3:15; 15:1-5; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:17), we are identified with Him to experience what He has passed through (Rom. 6:3-8; Eph. 2:5-7; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-5). By abiding in the Lord, by remaining in our organic union with Him as the Spirit in our spirit, we can be one with the Lord in His life-releasing death to lay down our soul-life and minister the divine life to others for the building up of His Body (Rom. 8:2, 4, 13).

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The Blood and Water in Experience

The blood speaks of the propitiating aspect of Christ's death, whereas the water speaks of the non-propitiating aspect of Christ's death. The blood is for God and has sin in view. But even when our sin matter is settled before God, we still need the water of the word for our continual purification. The blood does not cleanse our heart. The "I" cannot be cleansed; it must be removed. God does this by giving us a new heart. The blood cleanses our conscience because it puts things right before God; therefore, our conscience is at rest. "When I see the blood, I will pass over" (Exo. 12:13). The blood was on the outside for God to see; it was not for the believer, who was on the inside. The water stands for the non-propitiating death of Christ, and life is released by this death, which has nothing to do with sin.

From *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 46, p. 1186