

Conformation to the Image of the Son of God

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LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

CONFORMATION TO THE IMAGE OF THE SON OF GOD

by Witness Lee

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PREFACE

This book is composed of messages given in Chinese by Brother Witness Lee at a conference in Hualien, Taiwan, on April 28 and 29, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DIVINE CREATION OF THE TRIPARTITE MAN

BY THE TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26a, 27; 2:7, 9; 3:6-7, 24

OUTLINE

- I. According to the image of the Triune God—Gen. 1:26a, 27:
 - A. That man may be like God and express God.
 - B. That God's attributes may be expressed in man's virtues.
 - II. Creating a spirit for man with His breath of life—2:7:
 - A. As the organ for man to contact God and receive God.
 - B. As the organ for man to receive God and enjoy God.
 - III. Being the tree of life to the tripartite man whom He created—v. 9:
 - A. To be received by man as the life of man.
 - B. That man may live by Him as life in order to live Him out and express Him.
 - IV. The fall of man:
 - A. Due to receiving the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which indicates Satan, the old serpent—3:6.
 - B. Corrupting the image that God created for man—v. 7.
 - C. Losing the position to receive God as life—v. 24.
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THE BIBLE BEING A BOOK OF LIFE

We who love the Lord all love our Bible. We also know that the Bible is a book that speaks specifically about life; it is a book of life because it speaks specifically about God, and God is life. Although we may not know very much, we have tasted and have enjoyed God as life. In the Bible, whether the Old Testament or the New Testament, there are a lot of stories. On the surface it appears that what was recorded was merely some stories, but these stories are different. They may appear to be stories, but actually they are life. I want to say strongly that what is recorded in the Bible is not stories but life.

The first thing recorded in the Bible is that God created the heavens and the earth, all things, and mankind. This may have the appearance of a story, a history, but what is within this story, this history, is altogether life. God created the heavens, the earth, and all kinds of things as well, but God's creation did not stop there. The heavens are needed, the earth is also needed, and all things are needed, but these alone are not enough—at the end it was necessary for God to make man. Although God had created innumerable things, yet all those things were not the conclusion; the man whom He created last was the conclusion of all things. The ancient Chinese also said that man is the spirit of all things. Without human beings all things are meaningless. Therefore, concerning all things—whether the fowl of the air, the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, or the various kinds of trees and flowers—none of these is the conclusion. Man with a spirit is the conclusion. Whatever things we can see, especially the things on this earth, would be empty and meaningless if there were no human beings.

THE DIVINE CREATION OF MAN BY THE TRIUNE GOD

In the Image of the Triune God

In God's creation, only man has a spirit. This spirit is out of God who is life. God created man in this way simply for the purpose that man may obtain God as his life. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." It seems that before the Triune God created man, He held a conference. This was different from His creating of other things. In creating all other things, He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast. When He came to create man, it was not that simple. It seems that the Triune God held a conference, deciding that He should make man in His image and according to His likeness.

This is not a simple matter. I would like to emphasize again that although we are human beings, we were made according to God. Not only were we made by God, but we were also made according to God. How honorable this is! We human beings were made in the image of God. God made man in this way so that man can be like God and can express God and so that God's attributes may be expressed in man's virtues.

Creating a Spirit for Man with His Breath of Life

In Genesis 2:7 we are shown that God used the dust of the ground to make man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The breath of life out of God, after being breathed into man, became the spirit within man. The word for *breath* here in Hebrew is the same as the word for *spirit* in Proverbs 20:27, which says, “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah.” This implies that the spirit of man is the breath of life. According to essence, that was a breath of life; according to function, this breath of life is the spirit within us.

The Old Testament clearly says that there is a spirit within man, and this spirit was created by Jehovah for man. Also, Zechariah 12:1 says, “Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him.” This indicates that the spirit within man is listed alongside the heavens and the earth. The people in the world talk about the heavens, the earth, and man; but the Bible talks about the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man. There are the heavens, the earth, and also the spirit within man. The heavens are for the earth, and the earth is for man. If there were no heavens, then this earth would be short of sunlight, rain, and air. Hence the heavens are for the earth. Because there are sunlight, rain, and air, the earth can produce different kinds of animals and plants so that we can live on it. Apart from this, we would not be able to live. So the heavens are for the earth, and the earth is for man. Then what are we for? We are for God.

Concerning God, we may ask, “What is God?” In simple words, God is Spirit (John 4:24). Because God is Spirit, He can be enjoyed by us. In the Bible the word for *spirit* is the same as the word for *breath*; spirit is breath, and breath is spirit. God is Spirit, like air, that we may breathe Him in. For this reason God who is Spirit created a spirit for us so that we may use the spirit to worship Him and to gain Him. God used His breath of life to create a spirit for man as the organ for man to contact and receive God. This can be likened to eating. If a man wants to eat, he needs an organ that can receive food. Hence, God created a stomach for man to receive food. When we eat, we receive food into our stomach. This stomach has its special functions of digesting and assimilating the food taken in for our nourishment, and then transporting it to the whole body. These are the functions of the stomach. Similarly, God created for us a spirit in order for us to receive Him. By this spirit we can contact and receive Him. I have always told people that the more we use our mind to consider whether there is a God, the more we will feel that there is no God. But if we would simply turn to the depths of our being and exercise our spirit to call on the Lord’s name, we will touch God, and we will believe and

receive Him. Therefore, what we think in our mind is one thing, and the fact is another. God truly exists; as long as we exercise our spirit, we can receive Him.

Acts 17:28 says, “In Him [God] we live and move and are.” This is an extraordinary matter. If there were no God, we would not be able to live. God is the source of life; all that we have comes from Him. This God who is life has created the heavens, the earth, and all things, and us, that is, mankind, as well. Also, He created us according to Himself to be the same as He is. He created us in this way in order that we can be vessels to contain Him so that one day He can enter into us to be our life and content. In this way God and we, we and God, are joined as one. Not only so, God is Spirit. In order for us to contain Him, He created for us a spirit to be the organ for receiving and enjoying Him.

Being the Tree of Life to the Man Created by Him

For Man to Receive and Express Him

After God created man, He put man before the tree of life. This tree of life is God Himself (Gen. 2:9). The Triune God made man in His own image and also created within man a spirit that can receive Him. At this time, man was proper and was ready. Hence, God put man before the tree of life so that man might receive Him as his life and live by His life in order to live Him out to express Him.

Here, we can see that God’s creating of man is altogether a matter of life. God is life. He has a divine creation of man for the purpose that He can obtain a divine expression. In addition, this expression is not individual but corporate. I hope that every one of us can see that we are persons who have God. We are not only persons made by God but also persons who have God. Within us believers is God; hence, we should all feel honored and proud, not because of ourselves but because of the God within us. Because God is within us, we do not do the things that we should not do, and we do not go to the places where we should not go. We do not sell our birthright for the sake of a temporary enjoyment of sin.

Today we have God; hence, we have life within. We eat Him as the tree of life, live by Him, and live Him out. Within, we have God as life; without, we

have God as our living. Before we believed in the Lord, we lived a godless life. That living was empty, dark, vain, and false. After we believed in the Lord, this God who is the Spirit came into us to be our life, and we live by Him. We do not live ourselves any longer, but we live the One who is our life. At this time our living becomes one that is satisfied, joyful, peaceful, and full of energy. This kind of living includes many, many things. In conclusion, we may say that we become more loving, more shining, more holy, and more righteous.

***Causing Man to Live Out a Living of Love,
Light, Holiness, and Righteousness***

When God made man in the beginning, he was made in His own image. Because God is love, light, holiness, and righteousness, the man He created also had these virtues. Within every created person, there is the aspect of good. Although we are fallen, corrupted, those good things are still remaining within us. At the time we believed in the Lord Jesus, this God who is love, light, holiness, and righteousness entered into us to be our life, and we were filled with love, light, holiness, and righteousness within. It is this that makes the greatest difference in our believing in Jesus. This is not a matter of behavior but of life. It is the kind of living lived out by the life of God.

***Causing Man to Live a Life of Preaching the Gospel,
Nourishing, Meeting, and Prophecy***

Also, as soon as a person is saved, he wants to preach the gospel; he wants to tell people about Jesus. This is not his work or his special ministry but his living. This is like a tree bearing fruit; it is not by the working of the branches but by the living of the branches. From the standpoint of ethics, our Christian life is a living of love, light, holiness, and righteousness. From the standpoint of fruit-bearing, it is a living of preaching the gospel. If every believer lives this kind of life every day, then every one will bear fruit spontaneously. In addition, after fruit-bearing, there is the feeding of the lambs to lead the new believers. At the same time, we also like to come to meet together. This is not something that we try to do; it is our living. If we do not live this kind of life, we do not feel comfortable and happy; but when we live this kind of life—preaching the gospel, feeding the lambs, and meeting together—we feel proper, comfortable, and happy. We go to work, to school, or take care of our

housework; these are necessary aspects of our daily conduct. Within such a living, as those who are walking uprightly, being holy and not being earthly, with everything done righteously, we love people. Besides these things we also love preaching the gospel to save sinners, feeding the lambs, and meeting together to perfect one another, pursuing after the truth and speaking for the Lord. This is our Christian life.

From Genesis 1 and 2 we see that the Triune God made man in His own image, created a spirit for man by His breath of life, and became the tree of life to be received by man as his life so that man may live Him out to express Him. God entered into us to be our life; we live by Him in our body, and we live Him out. This is our living. God within is life, and we without are the living. These two are joined together, within and without, in harmony. This is to be organic.

We are not machines; we are living persons who have God. God lives within us as life; we live out a living without that is by God. This is to be organic. We live this kind of organic living every day. We love to preach the gospel, take care of the lambs, have small group meetings, and prophesy for the Lord. In this kind of living there are no methods or activities; even the more, there is no religion or arrangement. It is altogether the activity of life expressing God's living. I hope that the brothers and sisters can all be clear that this is God's original intention in creating man so that the created man may take God's life as his content and produce a living that expresses God.

The Fall of Man

God created man for the purpose that man would receive Him as life and live by Him in order to live out an organic living. Unfortunately, before God's desire was accomplished, Satan rushed in ahead of God to entice man to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (3:6). Because man received the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which signifies the old serpent Satan, he became fallen, and he had sin within him. Due to this, the image that God created for man was damaged; that image of love, light, holiness, and righteousness, was damaged (v. 7). Everyone would like to be loving toward others, straightforward, upright, holy, and righteous; yet no one can do it. This is because the love, light, holiness, and righteousness within were all damaged. At the same time, man also lost the position to receive God as life. God drove out the fallen man, and He used the

cherubim, which signify His glory; the flame, which signifies His holiness; and the sword, which signifies His righteousness, to block the way to the tree of life (v. 24). From that time God's glory, holiness, and righteousness would not again allow us, who have been damaged by sin, to contact Him and receive Him for enjoyment.

The Lord's Redemption

When the Lord Jesus came, He was God coming in the flesh to die for us on the cross in order to satisfy the requirement of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. His blood accomplished redemption for us and opened a new and living way in order that we can again draw nigh to God and contact God by His blood (Heb. 10:19-20). Through this we can receive God as our life. Once He comes into us, we are alive, and we obtain God as life. This life can cause us to have a living that lives by God and expresses God. This is an organic living, and it is also the Christian life. In totality, this is the church life. This is not religion but a group of people who have God and live out God. In this there are love, light, holiness, and righteousness. Furthermore, all the divine attributes are being expressed as virtues from us who have God. At the same time, we spontaneously can lead people to be saved, take care of new ones, perfect one another through meeting together, pursue the truth, and speak for the Lord. This is also the living we ought to have in the new way.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REDEMPTION AND SALVATION OF THE FALLEN TRIPARTITE MAN BY THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: Rom. 3:23-25; Gen. 3:24; Rom. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:19b, 22b; 12:2; 8:29, 19

OUTLINE

- I. The redemption by the vicarious death of the processed Triune God—Rom. 3:24:
 - A. Satisfying the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness (symbolized by the cherubim, the flame, and the sword in Genesis 3:24)—Rom. 3:23.
 - B. Bringing the fallen tripartite man back to the position of receiving God as life—v. 25.
- II. The salvation in life of the Triune God who passed through death and resurrection—5:10:
 - A. Regenerating the ones whom He justified—1 Pet. 1:3.
 - B. Sanctifying the ones whom He regenerated—Rom. 6:19b, 22b.
 - C. Renewing and transforming the ones whom He sanctifies—12:2.
 - D. Conforming the ones whom He transforms to the image of the firstborn Son of God—8:29:
 - 1. Making them sons of God—v. 19.
 - 2. That His Son may be the Firstborn among His many sons—v. 29.
 - 3. That He may have a corporate expression in His firstborn Son and His many sons, to accomplish His original purpose in creation:
 - a. That man may have His image.
 - b. That man may live Him out and express the glory and beauty of His divine attributes in the human virtues.

LIFE, LIVING, AND BEING ORGANIC

In the first chapter we saw that the main thing spoken in the Bible is life, living, and being organic. Life refers to God being life within us; living refers to our living by God and living out God. Both of these matters are organic. You can see that I am standing here; all my actions are organic because I am a living person. If there were only a wooden stand here, it would be lifeless and could not move. Such a thing is not organic but organized.

We believers of the Lord, in totality, are the Body of Christ, which is the church. This Body is an organism, not an organization. This organic Body is altogether a matter of God's being life within us, and of us living by God's life without, to live out God's living. This is entirely an organic matter. I have always said that the reason for the difference between the church and human organizations, such as ethnic associations and labor unions, is that those gatherings are merely human congregations; they are without God and without life. On the surface the church is a congregation of a group of people meeting together; actually, there is God as life within this group of people. This life is God, who is Jesus Christ and who is also the Holy Spirit—the all-inclusive, life-giving, compound, and indwelling Spirit.

By this life we love people, walk in the light, walk in holiness, and manifest uprightness in our doings. Moreover, by this life we preach the gospel, nourish newly saved ones, perfect the saints, and meet to speak the Lord's word. This is our living, not our particular work but our daily life. According to the revelation in the entire twelfth chapter of Romans, our Christian living, work, and service are all mingled together, not separated. All our work and service are a part of our living; they are mingled together with our living. Therefore, to us Christians there is no difference between living, work, and service. As far as we are concerned, living, work, and service are one. Therefore, God is our life, and we live God's living. This is altogether organic, without organization or arrangement. It is not a lifeless machine but a living organism.

THE REDEMPTION AND SALVATION OF THE FALLEN MAN BY THE TRIUNE GOD

According to the first two chapters of Genesis, we see that God made man according to His own image and breathed the breath of life into him to create for man a spirit able to receive Him. He also put man before the tree of life, implying that He wanted man to receive Him as life. At this juncture Satan

came in, embodying himself as a serpent, and seduced the God-created man to fall, injecting his poison, that is the sinful nature, into man. Thus, man became a sinner. We were born in sin, and we knew how to sin from birth. We have a sinful record before God, and we have a sinful nature within ourselves. We have lost the position to receive God as life, no longer being able to contact the holy, righteous, and glorious God. This was the situation of man's fall.

After four thousand years of waiting, one day the Triune God Himself was embodied as a man called Jesus. This wonderful God-man, Jesus, was the mystery of God. He lived on this earth for thirty-three and a half years. The living that He led was God's living. His walk, work, and service were God's testimony, expressing God. Finally, He went to the cross to accomplish an all-inclusive, mysterious death. His death was the death of God in humanity. He was the Lamb taking away all our sins, He was the bronze serpent terminating Satan and the world that belongs to him, He was the last Adam taking care of our old man, and He was the grain of wheat releasing the divine life. Therefore, this One who was crucified on the cross was the processed Triune God. Hence, there was redemption and salvation for us, the fallen tripartite persons. Redemption was accomplished for us by His death; salvation was completed for us by His life.

The Redemption by the Vicarious Death of the Processed Triune God

We now come to see the redemption accomplished by the vicarious death of the processed Triune God (Rom. 3:24). His death satisfied the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness (signified by the cherubim, the flame, and the sword in Genesis 3:24) and opened up for us the way to the tree of life. He opened up anew for us a way that we may come before God and draw near to God by the blood of Jesus. Originally, when we were created, we had the position to receive God as life, but we became fallen. Now the death of Christ has brought us fallen people back to the position to receive God as life. This is what was accomplished for us by His vicarious death.

The Salvation in Life of the Triune God Who Passed through Death and Resurrection: *Regenerating, Sanctifying, Renewing, and Transforming*

Following this, we come to see the salvation in life of the Triune God who passed through death and resurrection. Romans 5:10 says, "If we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." Christ not only died for us but also resurrected for us. His death redeemed us so that we may be reconciled to God. His resurrection caused Him to become the life-giving Spirit to enter into us to be our life to save us. The Triune God, after passing through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, eventually became a living Spirit to enter into us to be our life. This life today is our salvation.

First, this life regenerates the ones justified by God (1 Pet. 1:3). Through the death of Christ, God justified us; through the resurrection of Christ, God entered into us to be life to regenerate us. Second, after we were regenerated, God came to sanctify us who were regenerated by Him (Rom. 6:19b, 22b). Regeneration has already been accomplished; sanctification is still going on. Third, He renews and transforms us who are being sanctified by Him (12:2). On the one hand, He comes to sanctify us; on the other hand, He renews and transforms us. This renewal and transformation is not outward but inward, in our mind. The Spirit of God with the life of God causes a process of metabolism to take place within us. In other words, the life of God adds into us a new element so that we can have a transformation of life through an organic operation. This is not an outward change, which is artificial and false; it is an inward transformation of life, which is organic and real.

Originally, we were created in the image of God, but at that time the life of God was not within us. It was not until we believed in Jesus, and God entered into us to be our life to regenerate us, that we became persons possessing God, persons not only with humanity but also with divinity. Then this life of God within us gradually sanctifies us and also renews and transforms us so that what we live out outwardly is not merely good behavior but God's living. Behavior may be a performance, but living is something lived out; it is the element of the new life within us lived out spontaneously in its organic functions.

Conformed to the Image of the Firstborn Son of God

Fourth, the life of God continuously renews and transforms us so that eventually we who are transformed by Him may be conformed to the image of God's firstborn Son (8:29). The Lord Jesus originally was God's only begotten

Son; at that time, within Him there was only divinity, with no humanity. It was not until He became the Son of Man, putting on the flesh, that He had humanity. But this part, His humanity, was still not the Son of God. When He was crucified on the cross, His humanity was brought to death, passed through resurrection, and was uplifted to be brought into divinity. Through this, the part that was His humanity also became the Son of God. Now, He is the firstborn Son of God, having both divinity and humanity. Moreover, we who believed in Him and were regenerated became God's many sons (v. 19). He is the Firstborn, with divinity plus humanity; we are the many sons, with humanity plus divinity. He and we, we and He, both have the divine and human natures.

Before we were saved, we were persons living merely in our humanity. Some people do things by their reasoning, and they are able to suppress themselves in not getting angry or talking loosely; they are proper and ethical people. There are also some whose will is not that strong, who do things foolishly, who always make mistakes and get upset. Regardless of whether we are proper or not, ethical or not, we have only humanity and no divinity. But one day we believed in Jesus; the Son of God as the life-giving Spirit came into us. As soon as He came in, we who believed in Jesus, regardless of whether we were good or evil, had divinity added into our humanity. Therefore, in actuality, we Christians all have a double character. The first character is our original nature, our human nature; the second character is the added nature of God. If we pray and contact the Lord adequately, the divine nature within will increase, and we will be able to live out a superior living.

We all have this experience. Once this Jesus has entered into us, He will by no means go out. You may not want Him, but He still wants you; you may not like Him, but He still likes you. Within us He is full of grace, desiring to work on us in every way in order to sanctify, renew, and transform us step by step so that eventually we will be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God, being exactly like Christ. Christ the firstborn Son was simply divinity living in humanity expressing the divine attributes. It is the same with us, with humanity mingled with divinity; it is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us. Also, we live out this Christ from within us. The living of us the many sons is identical with that of Christ the Firstborn; our humanity lives by divinity so that the divine attributes may be expressed in the human virtues to the extent that we are full of the glory and beauty of

divinity. In this way Christ the Son of God can be the Firstborn among God's many sons so that God may obtain the corporate expression of His firstborn Son with the many sons for the accomplishing of His original purpose of creation.

We were created in His image by the Triune God. Now through the redemption and salvation of the Triune God, every one of us one day will be conformed to the image of God's firstborn Son. Thus, God's firstborn Son with the many sons will constitute God's corporate expression. This also accomplishes God's original purpose of creation, that is, that man may have God's image and, by God's life, live Him out to express Him. Moreover, He desires those who are saved by His life to express the glory and beauty of His divine attributes in their human virtues. When we who died with Christ and live with Him express the glory and beauty of the divine attributes, such as love, light, holiness, righteousness, patience, and humility, in our human virtues, God will obtain an unsurpassing glory through this. In this way we are corporately conformed to the image of the firstborn Son.