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UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF GOD AND THE PLAN OF GOD

In this article I would like to make clear that this is an attempt to understand the truth of God, what God is really like and what His plan for mankind is. While there still are some gaps in the overall picture and questions for which I have no answers, I do believe we are getting closer to the true picture.

If Henry Ford had waited with building his first car until he had figured out everything about air-conditioning and power-steering and fuel-injection and power brakes and electric windows, etc., then he would never have gotten around to building his first car. It is a good thing he didn't wait for perfect understanding about every aspect of designing the perfect car. He worked with what he understood and in that way he made a contribution.

We too have to work with the things God gives us to understand.

The secret [things belong] unto the LORD our God: but THOSE [THINGS WHICH ARE] REVEALED [BELONG] UNTO US and to our children for ever, that [we] may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

So here is a revised and updated picture in regard to these questions. See if it makes sense to you or not? But before we get into some of the specific details, here is a general point that is worthwhile to keep in mind.

SATAN'S GREAT DECEPTIONS

You know the Scripture, right?

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and SATAN, WHICH DECEIVETH THE WHOLE WORLD: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:9)

Yes, we know quite well that "the world out there" is deceived. They just don't understand and, in many cases, don't really want to understand the truth. But we in God's Church have also been deceived by Satan. He has deceived the WHOLE world, not just 99.999% of the world. Do we understand that we too have been deceived by Satan? Apart from Jesus Christ, I don't believe that there is anyone who has ever lived and who has not been deceived by Satan to some extent. He has deceived me and he has deceived you!

It is just a matter of degree. We have all been deceived to SOME degree. But hopefully we in God's Church are a whole lot LESS deceived than people out in the world. If we have ever in our lives believed something that is not true, then Satan has deceived us. Let's face it, we have all thought about a whole lot more things in our lives than just ... "whatsoever things are TRUE" (see Philippians 4:8).

Satan is the father of lies (see John 8:44) and he has built up gigantic webs of lies, on which we have built our human societies. Now the danger for us is as follows: when we come into a knowledge of the truth of God, then some of us think that now we understand the truth of God and therefore NOW we are

NO LONGER DECEIVED! Is that what you think?

The truth is that we in God's Church are also STILL deceived in many, many ways. It is just that when we come to understand the truth in one specific area, then we are no longer deceived in that one particular area. We have penetrated Satan's gigantic veil of deception in one specific area, but the veil still remains intact in many other areas.

Satan's deceptions are all entwined and interwoven, with one deception building on another. It is a part of Satan's method of holding humanity in slavery. And thus it takes "THE TRUTH OF GOD" to make us free from that slavery:

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

At this time I'd like to draw your attention to one particular form of deception Satan has used very effectively throughout history. It is a very effective way of deceiving people. It is something Satan has used to deceive YOU AND ME!

Simply put, this form of deception is TO CHANGE THE MEANINGS OF WORDS!

THE MEANINGS OF WORDS

God is the originator of language. God created Adam and Eve with the ability to understand and speak a language, without first laboriously having to learn it.

With God words do NOT change their meanings. If a new thought or concept needs to be expressed, then either a NEW word is created or an existing word is given an additional meaning. But the original meaning is not rejected or discarded.

When mankind after the flood again descended into sins and wickedness too rapidly, GOD created different languages at the time of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:6-8), possibly as many as 70 different languages, in accordance with the 70 nations referred to in Genesis chapter 10 (they add up to 70 in that chapter). Each people were given a complete language by God. When a language is viewed from the perspective of another language (e.g. when we as people who speak English view the Hebrew or the Greek language), then it is fairly common to find that many words have a range of meanings and applications. They are usually the result of the development of the language, to cope with changing needs and demands.

So we need to understand this:

ONE MAJOR WAY OF DECEIVING PEOPLE IS TO CHANGE THE MEANINGS OF WORDS THAT GOD INSPIRED TO BE USED IN HIS WORD!

We need to understand THE MOTIVE behind such changes. It is to deceive people and to blind their eyes to God's clear statements and revelations! This motive will obviously be covered up to appear as meeting the changing needs and demands on the language.

A very common form of this deception is found in the practice of turning a descriptive word or term into A NAME, thereby negating the literal meaning of the word. It could be the name for a person or the name for an event or an action ... but the literal meaning of the word recedes into the background. By changing

a descriptive word into a name for something, THEN a totally new meaning can be attached to that "name".

Let's look at some examples:

1) The Greek verb "baptizo" means "TO IMMERSE". People have changed this word (the noun "baptisma") into THE NAME for an act, baptism, and then they have attached their own definition to what this act means. The word correctly is a synonym for "IMMERSION", but people have given it the meaning of "sprinkling".

2) The Hebrew noun "heylel", used only once in the O.T. and translated as "Lucifer" (Isaiah 14:12) comes from the Hebrew verb "halal". This verb means "bright" and "shiny", but it also means "boastful" and "mad" because it is the individuals who are "bright and shiny", who so often end up "boasting" and therefore "being mad". However, the word does NOT mean "light" and it has nothing to do with "bringing" or "carrying". The Hebrew noun "heylel" really means "the bright and shiny one who is boastful and mad", meanings that are very clearly demonstrated by the use of the verb "halal". But by translating it into the Latin word "Lucifer" (which in Latin means "light bringer") it is presented as THE NAME for the individual being spoken to in this verse. This twist in meaning is one of Satan's deceptions.

3) The Greek word "hades" refers to the grave, but it has been turned into THE NAME for a place for the departed spirits of the dead ... "hell". But there isn't such a place for the "departed spirits of the dead" ... and by this change in the meaning of the word "hades" (or the Hebrew word "sheol") Satan has deceived the world.

There are other words like this, where a changed meaning of the word is the means for hiding the truth. We have examples of the same type of approach even in the recent history of God's Church.

But there ARE words that are important to understand in our discussion. These are words that are used in the Bible and whose meanings have been deliberately changed! It is Satan who has inspired these changes. The five words that are important for us to consider are:

- SPIRIT

- FATHER

- MOTHER

- FAMILY

- SON

Each of these words has been turned into a name or a title, in order to draw attention away from the real meaning intended by God! Let's look at these words more closely.

THE WORD "SPIRIT"

The word "spirit" is first used right in the opening verses of the Word of God, in Genesis 1:2. Now did God want to attach some special meaning to this word, something you would not inherently know just by looking at it?

NO!

God used the Hebrew word with its normal, usual meaning. Nothing mystical here! No esoteric meaning!

The Hebrew word translated "spirit" is "RUACH" or "RUWACH". It is a noun and it is derived from the verb with basically the same spelling, which means "to smell". "RUACH", the noun, means "breath" or "wind". That is what this word means! But people have changed that and decided that it also means "SPIRIT", which word people then define as THEY want to.

Now the English word "spirit" is derived from the Latin word "spiritus" which also simply means "breath"! So we have taken the Latin word for "breath" into the English language and then we have given it a meaning WE want it to have ... a "spirit", whatever that may be? There really is no evidence that there is such a thing as "a spirit", as people popularly think of it. But we have given the word the meaning we want it to have and we are CONVINCED that there are "spirits".

The New Testament starts with the Gospel of Matthew. The first 17 verses present the genealogy of Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus Christ. In the very next verse (Matthew 1:18) the word for "spirit" is used, translated as "ghost" in the KJV. Now there is no such thing as a "ghost". In the N.T. Greek, the word translated "spirit" (or "ghost") is "PNEUMA". This word primarily refers to "a movement of air", i.e. also "breath" or "wind". Again, this word also means "breath".

So here is the point:

The HEBREW word translated "spirit" really means "breath". The GREEK word translated as "spirit" or "ghost" also means "breath". Even the LATIN word from which our English word "spirit" is derived means "breath".

But WE have attached a special meaning to the word "spirit", which makes it different from "breath". We have no biblical evidence or support to do so, but we are convinced anyway.

Are we still convinced that Satan has not deceived us?

Later we'll look at how this applies to understanding the truth.

WORDS THAT TALK ABOUT "A FAMILY"

"A family" is a unit that consists of initially TWO individuals, who have the potential to produce children. The children they produce will reflect various combinations of the traits and attributes of both of these individuals. Apart from age and status within the family, these children will be in every respect just like the two initial individuals. That is what we mean by the word "child".

Before these two individuals achieve this potential of having a family, they are identified as "husband" and "wife". Once they achieve the implied potential, then they become known as "father" and "mother". The children that have been produced by their joint efforts are known as "sons" and "daughters". And the whole unit of father, mother, sons and daughters is known as "a family". "The father" is the one who is the head of such a family unit.

These words are easy to understand. But somehow, when GOD uses these words, then they supposedly don't have these clear meanings. Then they supposedly mean something else, something "figurative" or something "symbolical". And the clear meanings of these words are supposed to be erased from our minds when we read where God uses these words.

Later we'll also look at how this applies to understanding the truth. So let's move on.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF ROMANS 1:20

Here is another verse to think about.

For the invisible things of him FROM THE CREATION OF THE WORLD are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

Notice the following points:

- 1) The subject is "the invisible things about God".
- 2) The expression "from the creation of the world" is a translation of the Greek phrase "apo ktiseos kosmou". The word "kosmos" refers to the establishment of human society, not to the creation of this planet earth. This expression means "from the origin of human life" or "SINCE THE CREATION OF HUMAN LIFE".
- 3) These invisible things about God can be "seen" or understood by the human mind. They are actually quite "clear".
- 4) THE WAY these things can be understood is to look at and examine the things God created and established in general, but specifically by looking at the creation of human life (i.e. "the world").

[The word "world" is another one of those words whose meaning has been changed to confuse and deceive people. Check the word yourself in Webster's Dictionary and you'll find that it comes from the Old English "woruld" meaning "human existence" and from the Old High German "weral" meaning "the age of man". The word has to do with "human life" and NOT with this planet earth!]

- 5) Specifically two things can be understood by examining the creation and establishment of human life:
 - A) God's eternal power can be understood;
 - B) the nature of the Godhead can be understood.
- 6) These two things are what Paul means by "the invisible things of God" ... God's source of eternal power and God's nature.
- 7) People who reject this understanding which God has built into the creation (by changing the meaning of words and by creating confusion, etc.) are without excuse. There is quite a lot in this verse, isn't there? So let's put it all together.

Paul tells us in this verse:

If we look at and examine how God created us human beings and how God structured human society, we can come to understand God's eternal power and the very nature of God. But if we let people convince us that God only uses allegories and analogies and parables, but that He certainly doesn't mean for us to take Him literally at His Word, then our hearts (i.e. minds) will become "foolish" and "darkened" (see Romans 1:21) and we will not understand.

Romans 1:20 tells us that God has a plan, and that the way God created us and the institutions God gave mankind tell us something about God's nature.

THE REASONS WHY GOD CREATED THE THINGS HE CREATED

God does not act on impulse! For everything there is a reason and a purpose. The God who is aware of every single sparrow on earth (see Matthew 10:29) and who is aware of every single hair on the head of every person on earth (Matthew 10:30) also has very specific reasons WHY He created the things He created. We are to learn from looking at this creation around us and at ourselves.

Have you ever thought about Matthew 7:7?

Ask, and it shall be given you; SEEK, AND YE SHALL FIND; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (Matthew 7:7)

Do we understand what this means ... seek and you shall find? It means that we only see the things we are looking for! We won't see the things we are not looking for. When it comes to "finding the truth of God" one of the most important aspects is: TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!

We find ourselves as a part of a very structured creation, which is controlled by and subject to very clear physical laws. But those laws were also created by God. Now God COULD have created this universe in a different way with totally different laws. He could have created physical life in a totally different way. For example, had He wanted to do so, God could have created physical mortal beings that are totally independent of water and which never need to breathe and which don't have any blood in their bodies. Just don't ask me "how", because I obviously don't have the answers to those questions.

But the point is: there are REASONS why God did things the way He did them. When God decided to create physical mortal life, it was NOT a forgone inevitable conclusion that such a creation simply had to include the elements oxygen and hydrogen and carbon. God could have created a "world" where there is no water and no oxygen. God can do things just as He wants to!

So let's ask ourselves some questions.

- 1) WHY did God create the substance we call "WATER"? WHY did God give water the qualities that it happens to have?
- 2) WHY did God make it so that physical life is totally and utterly dependent on water? Water is a component of all our foods, it is the largest component of our blood; it is absolutely necessary for our foods to grow. Without water physical life, as we know it, could not exist.
- 3) WHY did God create us so that we ALWAYS have to BREATHE? We can hold our breath for a minute or two, but we surely must continue to breathe as long as we want to live. So WHY did God create us in this way, so utterly dependent on the process of "breathing"?
- 4) WHY did God create RIVERS? Rivers are a way of bringing life to areas that would otherwise be barren.
- 5) WHY did God create it so that the same water is used over and over again, without ever being used up? It rains upon the earth, produces fruits and growth, runs down to the sea, evaporates, moves inland in the form of clouds and starts the whole process over again. WHY?
- 6) WHY did God create us human beings in the form and shape that we have? WHY did God create us so vastly different from all other forms of physical life?

- 7) WHY did God design it so that human reproduction requires a cooperative effort from two different individuals? WHY didn't God design it so that one human being could reproduce on his or her own?
- 8) WHY did God give mankind the institution of "FAMILY"? The rest of creation does not have "marriage" and "family", and it is not essential for reproduction. So WHY create "a family"?
- 9) WHY did God design it so that trees can produce fruits which are food for us human beings?
- 10) WHY did God create this universe so vast? And WHY is the universe filled with two types of heavenly bodies ... stars and planets (besides comets, etc.)?

Searching for the answers to these questions and many others like them will bring us considerably closer to understanding God.

AN EVEN MORE BASIC QUESTION

God works according to a plan. God is prepared for every possible eventuality. The purposes God has established will be achieved. Nothing can stop God from achieving His goals.

God the Father is a spirit being. So is Jesus Christ. The angels are also spirit beings. [We'll look at the word 'spirit' later.]

God exists in a splendid and glorious environment. That environment has certain features (whether they are physical or of a spiritual nature is unimportant to this discussion). God has planned an even more glorious environment for all future eternity, which is described in Revelation chapters 21-22. It all centres around a magnificent city, the New Jerusalem. That future environment is something God has been planning for a long time ... already 4000 years ago Abraham looked forward to the time of the New Jerusalem (see Hebrews 11:10). I believe it is safe to assume that God had planned out the New Jerusalem even before the creation of Adam and Eve.

So a basic question to ask is this:

EXACTLY WHAT CAME FIRST? AND WHAT IS PATTERNED AFTER WHAT?

Did God first plan out the entire environment in which He Himself will exist for all future eternity, and based on that plan did He include certain features in our physical world to be a type of the reality that already exists in His presence or is going to exist in His presence?

OR

Did God first create this physical environment for mankind and then decide, based on the environment that He had made for man, that He would incorporate certain features into the environment in which He Himself will exist for all future eternity?

EXACTLY WHAT CAME FIRST?

Specific applications of this question are as follows:

- 1) Did God decide to create physical rivers on this earth BECAUSE there is a river of life in His presence ... OR did God first create physical rivers and THEN decide to also have a river in the New Jerusalem?

2) Did God create the never-ending and life-giving water-cycle BECAUSE that is the way the Holy Spirit is in His presence ... OR did God first create this water-cycle and then decide that this is a good analogy to use in explaining the Holy Spirit to human beings?

3) God created us human beings in the image and likeness of God. So ... did God create us as "breathing" creatures BECAUSE that is the way God Himself is ... constantly "breathing out" the Holy Spirit (not physical air) OR did God first create us as breathing creatures and THEN decide to refer to His Spirit as His "breath"?

4) Did God create the process of human reproduction in such a way that it takes cooperative efforts from TWO individuals to bring a new human being into existence BECAUSE the creation of spirit beings requires the cooperative efforts of two separate Beings (God the Father and Jesus Christ) OR is there no specific reason why God designed human reproduction to need two separate individuals for the process?

5) Did God create the father's part in the process of reproduction to be that of providing the seed BECAUSE that is what God the Father does in the process of salvation OR is there no significance in this process?

6) Did God give the first human beings the institution of "family" BECAUSE God Himself is in the process of building His Family OR did God first create the human family and THEN decide to use this institution as a nice analogy to teach human beings about what He has planned?

7) Did God create trees that produce edible fruits BECAUSE He had planned to have the tree of life in the New Jerusalem OR did God first produce fruit trees and THEN decide to also have the tree of life in the New Jerusalem?

8) Did God create us in His own image and likeness BECAUSE it is His intention that we become His children who will look exactly like He does OR was it a totally arbitrary decision by God to create man in His image and likeness?

9) Did God give human beings the potential to have sons and daughters who look basically like we do, and who are exactly the same type of being we are BECAUSE God Himself has planned to have sons and daughters who will look like He does and who will be exactly the same type of being that He is, OR is there no significance in our ability to have sons and daughters?

10) Did God create two types of heavenly bodies (stars which give off light and energy by themselves and planets which depend on light and energy from an outside source) BECAUSE there will be two types of spirit beings ... OR is there no significance in the difference between stars and planets?

These are a few examples of questions to think about! Remember what Paul said:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world ARE CLEARLY SEEN, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

If we really spend some time thinking about these questions and many others like them, then this verse will take on a whole new meaning for us. And we should not allow ourselves to be deceived by words, the meanings of which have been changed. God means what He says and God says what He means!

THE NATURE OF GOD

It is VERY clear from John 1:1 that currently there are two separate individual Beings, and only two, who are "God".

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The One whom we know as "Jesus Christ, the SON of God" is in this verse referred to as "the Word". The other Being, whom we know as "God the Father", and whom Jesus Christ came to "REVEAL" (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22), is in this verse simply referred to as "God".

We need to keep in mind that John's perspective here was to focus on Jesus Christ, because that is who his whole gospel is all about. Now obviously, John could equally correctly have focused on God the Father by starting with the statement:

"In the beginning was GOD!"

But that was not something that John felt he needed to explain. None of his readers disputed that "God" existed "in the beginning". What he felt he needed to explain was that Jesus Christ ALSO existed "in the beginning".

John's statement that there was one individual who was "WITH" another individual in the beginning makes very clear that there were TWO separate individuals. The word "WITH" allows no other conclusion ... and the same is true for the Greek preposition "pros", from which the English word "with" in this verse is translated.

It is quite clear from the first three verses in the gospel of John that God is NOT in any way a "trinity" or a "three-in-one being", and it is equally clear from these verses that the Holy Spirit is NOT "God". The Holy Spirit does not feature in these verses because it is not an individual!

These two God Beings have the form and shape we call "human". We have been created "in the image of God" and after "the likeness" of God.

And God said, Let us make man IN OUR IMAGE, AFTER OUR LIKENESS: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his [own] image, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

But we human beings consist of a different substance from God. We are composed of physical matter. But God is "a Spirit" (John 4:24) ... God the Father and Jesus Christ have bodies that are composed of "spirit". And those spirit bodies have the form and shape we call "human".

Now WHY did God create us looking like God, albeit in a different medium? The form and shape in which God created us REVEALS GOD'S INTENTION to ultimately create us "in the image and likeness of God" as SPIRIT BEINGS! The form and shape God gave us PROVES that it is God's intention to reproduce Himself through "children" who will look just like He does! The way God created us reveals God's ultimate intention. This should have been clearly understood "from the creation of the world (i.e. from the creation of human life)".

The spirit God is composed of has a specific geographic confinement ... it is always in the shape of His spirit body (head, body, arms, legs, etc.), in the image of which we human beings have been created.

And God as a spirit being is always in one specific location at a time. The same is true for Jesus Christ. However, irrespective of WHERE God may be at any specific moment in time, God has powers which enable Him to ALWAYS be aware of EVERYTHING that is occurring in every other place in this universe. And God also has the power TO ACT and do whatever He may want to do in any place without having to be there "in person". That is where "His Spirit" enters the picture.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Earlier we saw that the Hebrew and the Greek (and even the Latin) words translated as "spirit" or "ghost" simply mean "breath". These words are used from the opening statements onwards, in both, the Old and the New Testaments. God "INSPIRED" these words to be used. God didn't attach any hidden or special meanings to these words.

Now when God created life, WHY did He create this process of "BREATHING" ... a continuous process which may never be interrupted if life is to be sustained? WHY this never-ending process of having to take in something that is invisible to the human eye? And WHY, after we have taken it in (i.e. the air we breathe) and then utilized a portion of it (some of the oxygen), do we then have to give it out again (i.e. exhale)? Why can't we just "keep" the air we breathe? WHY "give it back"?

We are created in the image and likeness of God. So does God also have "a breath"? Yes, He does ... but WE refer to it as His "Spirit". In so doing we have changed the meaning of the words "ruach" and "pneuma", and even the Latin word "spiritus". And in that way we have obscured the things God had "shown" us:

Because that which may be known of God IS MANIFEST IN THEM; for God hath shewed [it] unto them. (Romans 1:19)

This is an interesting verse. Let's look at the Greek text for a moment. Here it is transliterated into our alphabet.

dioti to gnoston tou theou phaneron estin en autois ho gar theos autois ephanerosen (Romans 1:19)

Notice that the pronoun "autois" is used twice in this verse. It is the dative plural, which on its own means "to or for them". Thus the second phrase "ho gar theos autois ephanerosen" means "for the God has showed (it) to (or unto) them".

But the first phrase includes the preposition "en". Notice this difference:

IF it would read "phaneron estin autois", it would mean "is manifest TO them". But by adding the preposition "en" (which also requires the dative case after it) we get "phaneron estin EN autois" and this then means "is manifest IN them".

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament states that when the preposition "en" is used with a person, then it means "IN THE PERSON"!

Do you grasp what Romans 1:19 is telling us?

Paul tells us here:

"That which may be known of God (i.e. His eternal power and the nature of the Godhead, as per the next verse) is made obvious (i.e. "manifest") IN people BECAUSE God has showed it TO people."

You can't blame the translators for not fully understanding this. And so the best they can usually suggest (i.e. how they INTERPRET this statement) is to say: "it is manifest IN THEIR HEARTS AND CONSCIENCES"! But this verse is not talking about "hearts and consciences" ... it is talking about UNDERSTANDING THINGS!

But you and I, who have God's Spirit guiding our minds, WE should be able to understand. God's "eternal power" is a clear reference to THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD (or 'the holy breath of God').

In these two verses Paul tells us that the way God's Spirit (His eternal power) works is made clear by something God created IN US, and this has been obvious "from the creation of mankind (the world)". Hint: God's power is also called "breath" (pneuma).

Do we now understand?

God is a Being composed of spirit. He created the process of life to be totally dependent on ALWAYS maintaining a breathing pattern because HE, ALMIGHTY GOD, is constantly breathing out the essence that is absolutely essential for producing and sustaining life! This holy "breath" we call "the Holy Spirit".

God created this entire universe. The stars give us an indication of what God is like. In His glorified state, the face of Jesus Christ is like "the sun shining in its (full) strength" (see Revelation 1:16). What is it about the sun that is like God? It is the never-ending brilliantly powerful radiation of light and power! That is what God is like! God is constantly and permanently radiating out in every direction incredible power. And that power that is constantly going out from God is "His holy breath" or "His Holy Spirit".

Jesus Christ has existed with God the Father for all past eternity. Jesus Christ is also God. Jesus Christ also has a body that is composed of spirit. And Jesus Christ also has "a breath". That breath is also the Holy Spirit. Even as God the Father is a constantly "breathing out" Being (constantly radiating this breath of power), even so is Jesus Christ a constantly "breathing out" Being. God the Father and Jesus Christ are the same "type" or "kind" ... they are the "God-kind". They have the same type of "breath".

Can we now understand why it speaks about "the Spirit (or breath) of God" and "the Spirit (or breath) of Jesus Christ" and "the Holy Spirit(or breath)"? It doesn't matter who this spirit or breath emanates from (from the Father or from Jesus Christ), it is always the same power, the same "breath". Similarly, we human beings all share the same "breath of life" of physical air ... we all have this characteristic in common, that we all breathe THE SAME AIR in and out.

This power that constantly flows out from God fills everything; it reaches every nook and cranny in this entire universe. It is present everywhere. It is the building block of the universe. It is what everything consists of. It is the building block of every single atom and molecule in this entire universe. That is what we should understand "through faith".

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN WERE NOT MADE OF THINGS WHICH DO APPEAR. (Hebrews 11:3)

"The things which are seen" (physical matter, this whole universe) were made from "SOMETHING"! But that "something" is not matter. That "something" is in fact the Holy Spirit, which is invisible. When God speaks, it is His "breath" (i.e. spirit) that goes out; and that is how God creates "by speaking" (as

exemplified in Genesis chapter 1).

God can shape His Spirit and mould it and transform it just as He wishes; and it always remains under His control and at God's disposal. This "breath" is the power with which God controls even the minutest hair on the head of a person who may be more than a billion miles away from God's personal presence.

IT IS ABSOLUTE POWER!

It is the constant and never-ending radiation of this power that sets God apart from other spirit beings (i.e. angels). This is a major attribute that identifies God as God!

To get an idea of what this radiation of power from God is like, consider our sun: we are about 93 million miles away from the sun, a staggering distance by human standards. Only a very tiny, tiny portion of the energy which the sun constantly gives off ever reaches our planet. Yet that minute portion of energy from such an incredibly distant source is sufficient to provide for all our needs on this planet. Yet our sun itself represents only a tiny, infinitesimal portion of the power that is contained in "the breath of God". Incomprehensible power!

Now the angels are also spirit beings. But they are not the sources of self-generated power. They are **TOTALLY DEPENDENT** for all their powers upon the sources of power which God the Father and Jesus Christ make available to them. By our human standards those powers that God makes available to the angels are staggering; but by God's standards they are limited and confined. God can withdraw any powers at any time, totally as He chooses to do. This is what has happened with Satan and the demons ... God has withdrawn specific powers from them and in that way they are being "restrained".

So the difference with the angels is that they do not inherently "breathe out" the Holy Spirit of their own accord; they can only "breathe out" something they have first "breathed in". The only Holy Spirit that can flow out from them is what they have first taken in. God, by comparison, never needs to "TAKE IN" any Holy Spirit. It is this attribute that sets God the Father and Jesus Christ apart as "God" from all the rest of their creation! They are totally self-sufficient, possessing ALL power ... and nobody else is like this!

THE POWER OF GOD

God is the source of this power. The Holy Spirit is this power. Throughout the New Testament the Holy Spirit is referred to in terms of "power"! There are many examples. Christ referred to the giving of the Holy Spirit with these words:

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, UNTIL YE BE ENDUED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH. (Luke 24:49)

Paul explained the same thing when he said about the Holy Spirit:

For God hath not given us THE SPIRIT of fear; but OF POWER, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Literally, Paul is referring to "the breath of power".

Jesus Christ linked this power of the Holy Spirit very intimately to the kingdom and the glory of God, for which we are to pray:

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER. Amen. (Matthew 6:13)

It is GOD'S Spirit and therefore it is GOD'S power. To the Sadducees, who tried to trip Him up, Jesus Christ said that they did not really understand THE POWER of God.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, NOT KNOWING the scriptures, nor THE POWER OF GOD. (Matthew 22:29)

God is THE SOURCE of that power. This is something Christ mentioned to the High Priest at that time.

Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man SITTING ON THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and coming in the clouds of heaven. (Matthew 26:64)

This is a clear reference to Christ sitting with the Father on the Father's throne, from where the power of the Holy Spirit issues forth. In Revelation this is referred to as "the water of life", which flows out like an enormous, vast river from the throne of God.

And he shewed me A PURE RIVER OF WATER OF LIFE, clear as crystal, PROCEEDING OUT OF THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB. (Revelation 22:1)

Before that time of Revelation 22, during the millennial rule of Christ, the Temple where Christ will be is shown as the source of that power. In Ezekiel 47 it is pictured as a huge river that flows out from Christ's presence and "HEALS" everything that it comes in contact with (see Ezekiel 47:1-12). The last verse in this section provides a direct link to Revelation 22. Notice:

And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, AND THE LEAF THEREOF FOR MEDICINE. (Ezekiel 47:12)

This is almost identical to the description in Revelation 22:2.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, [was there] the tree of life, which bare twelve [manner of] fruits, [and] yielded her fruit every month: AND THE LEAVES OF THE TREE [WERE] FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS. (Revelation 22:2)

By showing us that this power issues forth "from the throne of God", it shows us that everyone who sits on that throne will be a source of that power. That power is embodied in "the breath of God".

Through mighty signs and wonders, BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:19)

Since both, God the Father and Jesus Christ, have this same "breath", therefore it is interchangeably referred to as "the power of God" (e.g. 2 Corinthians 13:4) and "the power of Christ" (e.g. 2 Corinthians 12:9).

After His resurrection to spirit life as the Son of God, Jesus Christ was once again a source of that power. Speaking about His resurrection, Jesus Christ said:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. (Matthew 28:18)

That's what it means to be God ... to have "all power"! Only someone who is A SOURCE of the power itself can truly say: "ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME". Nothing is held back! To be God means "to have ALL power".

So let's now look at what God has planned for us human beings.

OUR INCREDIBLE HUMAN POTENTIAL

The creation of Adam is recorded as follows:

And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

The first thing God (Jesus Christ, the second member of the God Family) did was make "the model" out of physical matter. Then "HE BREATHED" into this model. It is "God's breath" that is the source of all power. It is "God's breath" that can create life. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that proceeds forth from God which produces life. This first "breathing" on the first human being opened the way for physical mortal life for humanity.

Jesus Christ came to open the way for eternal spirit life for mankind. And so, AFTER Christ had fulfilled His part in making this process possible (i.e. after His resurrection), He again "breathed" on those who would receive the Holy Spirit shortly afterwards.

And when he had said this, HE BREATHED ON [THEM], and saith unto them, RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST (BREATH). (John 20:22)

This second "breathing" on human beings officially opened the way to eternal life for humanity. It officially opened access to the Holy Spirit.

In doing this, it is God's intention that we human beings are to become His "sons" and "daughters". It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to become "the children of God".

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD: (Romans 8:16)

Now remember the questions we asked earlier. Does God want us to attach some symbolical meaning to the word "children"? NO! God means exactly what this verse says! A child is the product of his parents and reflects the attributes and characteristics of his parents. A child is of the same "kind" as his father

and his mother.

To be "children of God" means to be "of the God-kind". The only way to get around this conclusion is to allow people to change the meaning of the word "children". But there is absolutely no justification for changing the meaning of "children".

This is in agreement with what Jesus Christ said, when He referred to the human potential in John 10:34:

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I SAID, YE ARE GODS? (John 10:34)

That is what God has planned!

Let's go back to Paul's statement in Romans chapter 8. Paul used verse 16 as the foundation for a logical deduction. Notice the next verse:

And if children, then heirs; HEIRS OF GOD, and JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:17)

So notice Paul's reasoning:

- 1) IF we are God's children, THEN we are also "HEIRS" ... individuals who are destined to inherit something.
- 2) ... THEN we are in fact THE HEIRS OF GOD ... destined to inherit the possessions of God! Now no being less than God could ever be an "heir of God".
- 3) ... THEN we are in fact JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST ... destined to inherit exactly the same things Christ will inherit. Once again, no being less than God could ever be a "joint-heir with Christ".

And if we are joint-heirs with Christ, it means that "ALL POWER" will also be given unto us, even as it has been given unto Christ. The fact that "all power" has been given unto Christ does not in any way negate the fact that Christ is still under the Father's authority. Likewise, when "all power" is given to the "joint-heirs with Christ", this does not negate the fact that they will all still be under the authority of Christ. What it really means is that they can then be TRUSTED with "all power" by God!

To be given "all power" means to become A SOURCE of the power of God, a source of the Holy Spirit, to "breathe out" the same way that God the Father and Jesus Christ "breathe out", to radiate power and light like the sun in its full strength just like Jesus Christ does, to sit with Christ on His throne, even as He sits with the Father on the Father's throne.

In a word, it means "to BE God"!

Jesus Christ explained this potential during His ministry. Notice John chapter 7 ...

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, OUT OF HIS BELLY SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER. (John 7:38)

The next verse explains that this is a reference to rivers of the Holy Spirit flowing out of the person.

(BUT THIS SPAKE HE OF THE SPIRIT, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet [given]; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (John 7:39)

Christ was saying here that those who respond to His message will have abundant and endless supplies of the Holy Spirit flowing out of them, like a huge river. That attribute --- having endless supplies of the Holy Spirit flowing out of a person --- identifies someone as a member of the God Family, as a "child of God"!

This reference is clearly to the "pure river of water of life" in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1). The symbolism which Jesus Christ presented is not just "receiving" the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit actually "FLOWING OUT OF THE PERSON", like a huge river! How could that possibly happen?

Well, that river flows out from "the throne of God and of the Lamb". The "joint-heirs with Christ" will sit on the same throne that Christ will sit on. That is what Christ very clearly said about ALL those who "overcome" ... that they would sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:21). So God the Father and Jesus Christ are pictured as sharing one "throne" or one "seat", and Jesus Christ and all those in the first resurrection are pictured as sharing one throne.

WHO DOES GOD THE FATHER "SHARE" HIS THRONE WITH?

We have certain ideas about "thrones". To us they symbolize the seat of the power of a king. When a king sits on his throne, then he "RULES", making laws and decrees, and he passes judgments. And that is fine. But there is much more to it than that!

Remember that our concepts of "ruling" are largely influenced by the ideas of Satan (could Satan have deceived us just a little bit in this area also?). Satan had certainly influenced the ideas of the twelve apostles in this area. Remember how they argued about wanting to sit on the most important "thrones", right next to Christ?

And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons MAY SIT, the one ON THY RIGHT HAND, AND the other ON THE LEFT, in thy kingdom. (Matthew 20:21)

The reason for this request was so that they could "RULE"! You are familiar with the account, and how the ten other apostles were jealous when they heard about this request. They all had a worldly concept of "thrones" and "ruling", as Jesus Christ proceeded to explain.

But Jesus called them [unto him], and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles EXERCISE DOMINION over them, and they that are great EXERCISE AUTHORITY upon them. (Matthew 20:25)

That is precisely what they all had in mind ... exercising dominion and authority. It is precisely the same kind of thing that men in the Church's Spokesmen's Clubs have speculated about many HUNDREDS of times with words like:

"Boy, when we are spirit beings, we'll just go in there and straighten out this mess and we won't put up with all this nonsense and rebellion. Why, we'll just lay down the law ..." and on and on goes the wishful thinking about "exercising dominion and authority"!

Let's face it: most of us don't really view thrones and rulership any differently than the way the twelve apostles viewed it at that stage.

But we **MUST** come to see it differently, vastly differently!

BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister (i.e. servant); (Matthew 20:26)

It is Satan who had wanted to "exalt his throne" (see Isaiah 14:13) and to sit on "the seat (or the throne) of God" (see Ezekiel 28:2). It was not for Satan though. Instead, what Satan craved and lusted after is what God **FREELY** offers to all those who will be in the first resurrection.

The word "throne" simply means "a seat". The Bible shows there are different **REASONS** for sitting on a throne. Specifically, we should understand that there is a different reason for sitting on a throne during the millennium and the 100-year period on the one hand, and all future eternity beyond that on the other hand.

When it speaks about ruling over nations and judging nations, then each throne is for only one individual to sit on and those thrones are not shared with other individuals! Thus during the millennium the twelve apostles will each sit on one throne, each representing rulership over one of the tribes of Israel.

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, **YE ALSO SHALL SIT UPON TWELVE THRONES**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

However, collectively this is the period of time when all those in the first resurrection are sitting **WITH** Christ on **HIS** throne! This expression is clearly symbolical. It is not that in the resurrection two or more spirit beings will actually **SIT** on **ONE** seat! This expression "to sit with me on my throne" simply represents **RULING WITH CHRIST**. So while for the period of the millennium the twelve apostles are pictured as each sitting on one throne, each ruling over one of the tribes of Israel, at the very same time they (and all those in the first resurrection) are also pictured as sitting with Christ on **HIS** throne (Revelation 3:21). All those who rule together are pictured as sitting on the same throne.

That will be a time of judging nations and instructing them in God's laws and God's ways. They will be "ruled over" by spirit beings, and in the end some of them will not attain unto salvation, but be burnt up by fire from heaven (see Revelation 20:9). The same type of ruling and judging will take place during the 100 years that follow the millennium. During that time everyone who was in the first resurrection will have his own throne, while at the very same time also being pictured as sitting with Christ on His throne.

Once we come to the time beyond the second death, the time when there will no longer be any physical human beings and when there will be "no more death" (see Revelation 21:4), **THEN** the purpose of the one and only throne in existence will be different!

In the New Jerusalem there will be **ONLY ONE THRONE!** It is "the throne of God **AND** of the Lamb". This is the throne before which "the great multitude" of Revelation chapter 7 is pictured as standing! Read that account very carefully.

Verse 9 shows this multitude "**WHICH NO MAN COULD NUMBER**" as "**STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE AND BEFORE THE LAMB**".

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, STOOD BEFORE THE THRONE, AND BEFORE THE LAMB, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; (Revelation 7:9)

Verse 15 repeats that they are "BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ... DAY AND NIGHT". In this verse only God the Father is mentioned as "sitting on the throne".

Therefore are they BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. (Revelation 7:15)

But verse 17 then adds that Jesus Christ, the Lamb, "IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE".

For THE LAMB which IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

So clearly, this is a throne which God the Father in some way shares with Jesus Christ. Notice again Revelation 3:21:

To him that overcometh will I grant to SIT WITH ME IN MY THRONE, even as I also overcame, and AM SET DOWN WITH MY FATHER IN HIS THRONE. (Revelation 3:21)

So from that time onwards (i.e. from the time of the New Jerusalem) there is only one seat of power in the whole universe ... the throne of God the Father. And God the Father will share that throne with only Jesus Christ. The two God Beings who have always existed together will be the ones to rule over their entire Family.

Those in the first resurrection are NOT pictured as sharing that throne with God the Father! God the Father will share His throne, i.e. His rulership, only with Jesus Christ. However, while those who were in the first resurrection will not be sitting on the throne of God the Father, they will still have an elevated status within the structure of the Family of God! That elevated status is expressed in the fact that ONLY those in the first resurrection will actually be the permanent citizens of the New Jerusalem. That is expressed in having the name "New Jerusalem" written upon them (see Revelation 3:12). All the other members of God's Family will then be citizens of "other cities", and they will frequently enter the New Jerusalem to appear before God the Father and before Jesus Christ ... but they will only be "visitors" without any "permanent residence" in the New Jerusalem.

So who does God the Father share His throne with? Only with Jesus Christ!

So for all future eternity, beyond the second death, there will be ONLY ONE THRONE! It is the throne of God the Father. And God the Father has determined that He will "SHARE" it with Jesus Christ. "Ruling" over the Family of God then will take on a totally different significance than what was involved in "ruling with Christ during the millennium over physical mortal human beings". During the millennium the "ruling" involved guiding human beings who were still fallible and subject to making mistakes. They needed guidance and direction, together with clear incentives to resist yielding to selfish pulls and desires. After the time of the second death, when only God the Father and Jesus Christ rule, then "ruling" will involve leading a Family in which EVERY MEMBER has the mind of God. There will be no "wrong pulls and desires" to guard against, because then it will be "impossible to sin" (see 1 John 3:9). Ruling at that time will involve providing leadership for the whole Family, but without any possibility of transgression or

rebellion or "wrong attitudes" towards God the Father.

By then the plan of salvation will have been brought to completion! The goals God had set will have been accomplished! The Family that God had planned to build will be exactly as God had planned it. The relationships that God had planned will have been achieved. From then onwards, for all future eternity, there will only be one Family in existence (excluding Satan and the demons who will have been banished to wander in darkness) ... the Family of God! The whole Family will dwell together on earth, comprising many other cities in addition to "the New Jerusalem".

Within the whole Family everyone will have the desire to serve every one else. Those who are BEFORE the throne (see Revelation 7:15) will serve God all the time, "day and night". And those who are ON the throne, God the Father and Jesus Christ, will provide all the needs for those who are "before" the throne. This is explained in the last two verses of chapter 7.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Revelation 7:16-17)

Christ leads them to "living water". That is the water that also flows out of "the belly" of those in the first resurrection (see again John 7:38). This again shows the somewhat elevated status within God's Family for those who will be in the first resurrection. That is why it is "a BETTER resurrection" (see Hebrews 11:35).

The living water is shown as coming from the throne of God.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Revelation 22:1)

Then EVERYONE will have a nature of AGAPE LOVE, a genuine outgoing concern for the total well-being of every other being in existence. Opportunities to serve and to provide for the needs and the well-being of other individuals will give the greatest satisfaction of all. No one will "seek" to be exalted; no one will have a spirit of wanting to put self first. God the Father will always be totally in control and acknowledged as the supreme Head of the Family. God's standard is that those who are the greatest are the ones who serve the most, not just symbolically, but in deed and in truth. And we will all have natures that will inherently think that way, the way God views life and living.

THE INHERITANCE OF GOD

We, who have been called to be in the first resurrection, are the "heirs of God". Many people don't really understand what this means.

On the human level "an heir" is someone who is destined to inherit physical goods and possessions, and, in some cases (e.g. the son of a king), even a position of prestige and power. But that is not what it means to be "an heir of God".

We must not confuse "the rewards" for overcoming with "the inheritance of God". Rulership with Jesus Christ during the millennium is NOT "the inheritance" ... it is only "a reward". The thrones on which the twelve apostles will sit are not "the inheritance of God" ... they are just "rewards", that's all.

Nor is this whole universe the inheritance that God has offered to us. The inheritance of God does not

consist of physical matter, which is what this universe consists of. And with God it is not a matter of "OWNING" this universe as opposed to someone else "owning" it. The universe is not something that anyone can "stick in his pocket" and take with him. It is there (even when we refer to the NEW heaven and earth) and every spirit being will live and exist in it and enjoy this "living space". Yes, God owns it all, but "ownership" will never be an issue in the eternal God Family. So yes, we can technically say that the whole God Family will "own" the universe ... but that is not the thing Romans 8:17 (heirs of God) has reference to.

The inheritance of God is to share the power of God. The inheritance of God is to inherit His very nature, to be like Him and like Christ, "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29), to whose image we will be "conformed". And Christ is in the image of the Father. The inheritance of God is to also become God-beings from whom the power of the Holy "Spirit" will also constantly radiate out, thereby becoming beings to whom "ALL POWER HAS BEEN GIVEN", even as it has to Jesus Christ.

That is the inheritance those in the first resurrection will formally and officially receive when the Father's throne is established on the New Earth, in the New Jerusalem.

WHY BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Do we understand WHY God instituted the practice of baptism? We saw earlier that the word simply means "immersion". So WHY did God institute this ritual of "IMMERSION"? And WHY the baptismal formula?

The key Scripture to examine in this regard is Matthew 28:19. So let's carefully look at this verse.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Matthew 28:19)

Let's look at the transliterated Greek text:

poreuthentes oun matheteusate panta ta ethne baptizontes autous eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos (Matthew 28:19)

The expression "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" is translated from the Greek:

"eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos".

"Eis" with the accusative used here means "INTO". There is a different preposition for "in", which we looked at earlier. The use of "onoma" here is a very common one. It is frequently found in the Greek LXX and also in the papyri to mean: "POWER" or "AUTHORITY", usages that somewhat clarify the meanings of this word.

Notice how "onoma" is defined in Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon:

"By a usage chiefly Hebraistic the name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is roused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e. for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences,

deeds, etc."

These common Hebraistic uses of "name" certainly apply also to Matthew 28:19. To be immersed into "the name" had to have some significance to people ... and it did, picturing power and authority. Remember that Jesus Christ had just prefaced this statement with the words: "ALL POWER is given unto me ...".

So the baptism formula correctly reads: "... immersing them INTO the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (or Breath)." What does this mean ... to be "IMMERSED INTO" these names?

THIS FORMULA EXPRESSES THE INHERITANCE OF GOD!

And, upon genuine repentance, at baptism we receive the first instalment, the down-payment as it were, of the inheritance God is offering us.

In plain language, at baptism we begin the process of becoming immersed INTO the power that is shared by God the Father and by Jesus Christ ... and that power IS the Holy Spirit! That power is available ONLY to the Father and to Christ and to those to whom God gives it upon repentance and baptism.

Put another way, the baptism formula shows us what we receive (we receive what we are "immersed into"). We "receive" the name of God and of Christ ... we become begotten children of God, with God's name upon us. And we also "receive" the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very power-source of God Himself, the one main attribute that will identify us as "Gods" for all future eternity.

Think for a moment: to be baptized into "the power and authority of the Father and of the Son" only is not enough! It is by, ultimately in the resurrection, becoming a source of God's powerbase, the Holy Spirit, that we actually become immersed into the power of the Father and the Son.

Can we grasp WHY ... "and of the Holy Spirit" simply HAD TO BE INCLUDED in the baptismal formula? To be immersed into the name of God the Father and of Jesus Christ, we must also share "their Breath".

BUILDING THE FAMILY OF GOD

Having created us in His image and in His likeness to show us that it is His plan to ultimately change us into beings like Himself, God then gave us the institution of "a family" because it is His goal to build a Family, the Family of God.

God's ultimate, long-term goal is that there will be ONE Family, which will include everyone.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, OF WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED, (Ephesians 3:14-15)

It will be "the Family of God"!

God is the Father of the whole Family. Jesus Christ is the firstborn of many brethren.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN. (Romans 8:29)

All those in the first resurrection will be the same type of Being that Jesus Christ is.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

The expression "when He shall appear" makes clear that this is a reference to what occurs AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. This whole letter is addressed to those who were being "called" to be there at Christ's second coming. The "we" refers to Christians, those who will be in the first resurrection.

Even though we will be "like Christ", there will be different degrees of "glory". That is something we can learn from looking at the stars, where some have a greater glory than others.

[There is] ONE GLORY OF THE SUN, and ANOTHER GLORY OF THE MOON, and ANOTHER GLORY OF THE STARS: for [ONE] STAR DIFFERETH FROM [ANOTHER] STAR IN GLORY. (1 Corinthians 15:41)

In the next verse Paul explained that God made it this way so we would learn something about the resurrection to spirit life.

SO ALSO [IS] THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: (1 Corinthians 15:42)

Again, "the resurrection" Paul refers to here is the FIRST resurrection, not the second or the third!

So we see first of all the Father-Son relationship within the Family God is building. One Father and many sons (and daughters, by implication). But within that context the Bible presents another relationship ... that of Husband and Wife, or Bridegroom and Bride.

Another clear picture that is presented in the Bible is that Jesus Christ is THE HUSBAND or THE BRIDEGROOM, and all those who will be in the first resurrection will collectively make up THE WIFE or THE BRIDE! This is explained by Paul in Ephesians chapter 5 and by John in the last few chapters of the Book of Revelation.

So the question is this: did God before the creation of Adam PLAN that there would be a certain relationship between Christ and the firstfruits in His Family, and BASED ON THAT PLAN did God then establish the family relationship for human beings ... or did God first create human beings and give us marriage and a family relationship AND THEN decide to use this as a good illustration for what He has planned on the spirit level? Again our question is: WHAT CAME FIRST?

It seems self-evident to me that the spiritual planning came first!

This means that God decided to build His Family in a certain way. And then God established A REPLICA, as it were, of this process on the physical level. The creation of man and the institutions God gave man are to help us understand exactly how God is building His Family and "the Godhead" (Romans 1:20).

In Ephesians chapter 5 Paul explained the parallel between a physical marriage and the relationships

this entails, and the relationship between Christ and the Church at this time. He explained that even as a husband is the head of the wife, so Jesus Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). He then explained the duties of both, husbands and wives. Then Paul said in verse 29:

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, EVEN AS THE LORD (nourishes and cherishes) the church: (Ephesians 5:29)

Notice that Jesus Christ is the subject of this verse. Now let's see the next verse ...

FOR WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY, OF HIS FLESH, AND OF HIS BONES. (Ephesians 5:30)

This is quite an explicit statement! Paul is leading up to the next verse in which he says that we are going to be ONE WITH CHRIST.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (Ephesians 5:31)

Paul actually quotes Genesis 2:24 to apply this to the relationship the Church (those in the first resurrection!) will have with Christ. This is the strongest way Paul could have portrayed the Church being joined to Christ, like an equal partner, yet under His authority. Only beings of the same KIND can be joined together in this kind of relationship! Again, this is proof that those in the first resurrection are going to be exactly like Christ, able to join with Him on His level!

In the next verse Paul further explains what he means.

This is a great mystery: but I SPEAK CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. (Ephesians 5:32)

Paul is telling us that the relationship "the Church" will have with Christ during the millennium is exactly the same as that which, in an ideal marriage, the wife will have with the husband.

Can we understand why Christ says that all those who overcome will sit with Him on His throne ... when we are shown to be "members of His body"? Don't make the mistake of relegating these statements to the realm of being "mere analogies". These are THE REALITIES that God planned out even before He created human beings. If anything, the relationship between "Christ and the Church" (verse 32) will be even closer and more intense. We'll be close and yet we will be separate individuals, even as a husband and a wife are separate individuals.

Now let's move on to the Book of Revelation. There we see more details regarding WHEN these things are to take place. Notice Revelation 19:7.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME, AND HIS WIFE HATH MADE HERSELF READY. (Revelation 19:7)

What is the purpose of "a marriage"? To understand this, we should look at THE ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS GOD GAVE THE FIRST MARRIED COUPLE. Here they are:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, BE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY, AND REPLENISH THE EARTH, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

What was the very first instruction?

The instruction was: produce children and populate the earth.

So WHY does Christ "marry" the Church at His second coming? It is so that TOGETHER they will produce many children and "populate the earth". That very first instruction to Adam and Eve was given to show what God Himself has planned for the future.

So at His second coming Christ will "MARRY" all those in the first resurrection, and they (i.e. we) will become His wife!

Next question: will Christ EVER thereafter "marry" someone else? The answer is NO! Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God" will not marry "SOMEONE" else, yet there is "another bride" mentioned. We'll see more on this later.

So can any other human being who is changed into a spirit being at any time after the second coming ever become a part of "THE WIFE" of Christ? Again, the answer is NO, certainly not! Christ will NOT continue to add to his wife as did King Solomon, for example.

Christ will marry ONE wife and then together they will produce MANY CHILDREN! Who will be the children that this "marriage" will produce? The children of this marriage will be all those who eventually become a part of God's Family from the people who live during the millennium and during the 100-year period that follows the millennium.

But as far as those "children" are concerned, Christ will NOT "marry" any of them. That is why Christ in Old Testament times gave the law that a man was NOT to marry a woman and her daughter or a woman and her sister "to vex her" (see Leviticus 18:17-18). Those children will have a different status from the status "the wife" will have. But some relationships WILL change.

From the time of the second coming of Christ until the time when God the Father will come to this earth certain relationships will exist. God the Father will NOT be on earth during that entire time. The relationships and the events will be as follows:

A) Jesus Christ returns to this earth as "the Bridegroom".

B) The first resurrection, consisting of 144000 (see Revelation 14:1-4), takes place and all those individuals collectively will make up "the Bride" whom Christ will "marry". They are the ones who will sing "a new song" that no one else can "learn". That song will describe THE RELATIONSHIP which they will have to Jesus Christ ("members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" as per Ephesians 5:30) AND NO ONE ELSE will ever again enter the same identical relationship with Christ.

C) The wedding supper then takes place. Those in the first resurrection will be inaugurated into the "mansions" Christ has prepared for them (i.e. for us, see John 14:2). Thrones will be set up for all those in that resurrection, to rule with Christ for the next 1000 years (Revelation 20:4; Revelation 5:10), as well as for the 100-year period that will immediately follow the millennium.

D) After that wedding supper the Bridegroom and the Bride move on in their roles to being the Husband and the Wife. They will get down to the business of producing "children", i.e. leading human beings during the millennium into the truth of God and into a right relationship with God. Those human beings will continue to live out their physical lives; there will be no "death" in the presence of Christ for those who whole-heartedly obey God.

E) This process will be briefly interrupted on two occasions when disobedient "children" will be destroyed ... first at some stage DURING the millennium (Ezekiel 38 & 39) and then again at the end of the 1000 years (Revelation 20:7-9).

F) Following this second "interruption", the second resurrection, which is to physical life, will take place. The process of the Husband and the Wife nurturing "children" will continue, as they lead the people who came up in that resurrection into the same right relationship with God.

G) At the end of that 100-year period, after a total of 1100 years of this "Husband-Wife" relationship, there will be an innumerable multitude of "children". There will also be some, however many is not indicated, who are in a state of rebellion against God's ways. And so the plan of salvation, the plan of God building His Family through mortal human beings, is about to reach its culmination.

H) The third resurrection, for those who during the first 6000 years of man's existence committed the unpardonable sin, takes place. This resurrection is typified by the rich man in the parable of 'Lazarus and the rich man' (see Luke 16:19-31). This is a resurrection to mortal life. Mortality is "the great gulf" that is fixed between those in this third resurrection and those who have been changed into immortal spirit beings. At the same time as this resurrection takes place, the innumerable multitude of "children" that the marriage between Christ and those in the first resurrection produced are changed into immortal spirit beings. Those who were in a state of rebellion towards God are NOT changed; they will still be just as physical as those who have just been resurrected. THEN a worldwide lake of fire will burn up EVERYTHING THAT IS PHYSICAL!

It will be the time when the wicked are "burned up" (Malachi 4:1) and when they are turned into "ashes" under the feet of those who have been given immortality (Malachi 4:3).

AND THAT WILL IN A SENSE BE THE END OF "THE MARRIAGE" BETWEEN JESUS CHRIST AND THOSE IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION!

I) THEN this earth and the entire universe will "pass away" (Revelation 21:1). In its place God will then, in the presence of the entire and complete Family of God, create a NEW universe and a NEW earth (same verse). That NEW earth need not have the same dimensions (e.g. diameter of the present earth, etc.) as our present earth, because it will serve a totally different purpose from what has been the purpose for our present earth. On this NEW earth there will be no oceans ("and there was no more sea"). The new universe will be an incorruptible and permanent environment for the entire Family of God to live in.

J) THEN God will bring down to this NEW earth the permanent capital city for the entire universe, the NEW JERUSALEM. It will be the permanent home for God the Father and Jesus Christ and all those who were in the first resurrection. Other cities will be established for all those who were "the children" which Jesus Christ and His "wife" produced.

And that's about the end of the story, as far as God has thus far revealed it to us through His Word.

Now:

The close "relationship" between Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection will continue for all eternity! It will from then on also include God the Father, because they will be the permanent residents of the New Jerusalem. God the Father will sit on the only throne, which He will share with Jesus Christ. But from that time onwards those who were in the first resurrection will no longer be referred to as "the Bride" and "the Wife" of Jesus Christ, because they will no longer be engaged in the business of producing and nurturing "children". THAT PHASE of God's plan will have been completed!

To make this quite clear:

The "wife" relationship of those in the first resurrection to Jesus Christ will only last 1100 years!

From then onwards the focus will be on God the Father! The indications are that God the Father has thus far never come to this earth! Only Jesus Christ has come to this planet. And apparently God the Father never will come to "this" present earth! It will "pass away"! And it is only when there is a NEW earth, that God the Father Himself will come to that earth. His presence will create a totally new focus for the whole Family! Yes, God will have been "the Father" all along, but without His presence that term had a different meaning than when God the Father will be there in PERSONAL presence amongst all His children!

Remember the statements about Jesus Christ in Isaiah chapter 9.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

This is a prophecy about the millennial rule of Jesus Christ. It is IN THIS CONTEXT that Jesus Christ is also called "The everlasting FATHER". {The word "everlasting" here basically means "age-lasting". The same word is used in Habakkuk 3:6 to refer to "everlasting MOUNTAINS", meaning age-lasting mountains.} The reason Jesus Christ is accorded this name of "Father" is because that is precisely His role during the millennium ... Christ will be "the Father" and those in the first resurrection will be "the Mother" (the Church is 'the mother' of us all) and together they will have "children".

Remember also that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Yet we see many terms that could easily be "confusing" if we don't understand the truth. For example, generally God the Father is referred to as "Father", yet in Isaiah 9:6 (as we have just seen) Jesus Christ is called "The everlasting Father". That could easily be confusing ... when two different individuals are both referred to as "Father".

Similarly, Jesus Christ is referred to as "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). This shows we are to have a BROTHER-relationship with Christ. Yet Christ is also referred to as the Bridegroom and Husband of those in the first resurrection. This implies a WIFE-relationship to Christ. This could also easily be confusing ... is our relationship to Christ that of being His "brothers" or of being His "Wife"?

Furthermore, those in the first resurrection are referred to as the Bride and "Wife" of Christ (e.g. Revelation 19:7). But a little later it is THE NEW JERUSALEM which is referred to as "THE BRIDE, THE LAMB'S WIFE" (see Revelation 21:2; Revelation 21:9-10). This too can be confusing ... EXACTLY WHO is going to be Christ's "wife", those in the first resurrection or the New Jerusalem?

Keep in mind that God is NOT trying to cause confusion! With God things are quite clear! And the roles

are VERY CLEARLY identified! They don't really overlap.

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

There is a very simple key to understanding what God really means. And that key is this:

UNDERSTAND THAT AT DIFFERENT TIMES DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS APPLY!

During the millennium our relationship to Jesus Christ will NOT be that of "younger brothers and sisters"! That is NOT a relationship for the millennium! During the millennium our relationship to Christ will be that of "His wife"! And during that time the title "The everlasting (age-lasting) Father" will apply to Jesus Christ. This should be clear from the fact that THE MILLENNIUM STARTS OFF WITH US "MARRYING" JESUS CHRIST!

The millennium is NOT the time when we are "joint-heirs" with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17), who have "inherited all things" (Revelation 21:7). That inheritance is only for AFTER the whole plan of salvation has been completed. And during the millennium we in one sense sit with Christ on HIS throne to symbolize that we will share in His rule, but at the same time we will also have our own thrones.

The purpose of the millennium is TO WORK! To do the work of leading and guiding literally MULTIPLE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE into a right relationship with God! The focus will be to serve and to work with physical mortal human beings. The focus will NOT be on those in the first resurrection establishing a permanent and glorious and satisfying relationship with God the Father and "enjoying" the pleasures that are to be found at the right hand of God (see Psalm 16:11).

It is THE FOCUS of the millennium that requires certain "relationships".

Then, when we come to the time beyond the second death and beyond the lake of fire, TOTALLY DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES will exist. And then the relationships that existed up to that time will fall away! They will have served their purposes! They will not be needed again! God's eternal purpose will have been achieved! And NEW RELATIONSHIPS will be entered into.

At the start of that time God tells us:

And he that sat upon the throne said, BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (Revelation 21:5)

That's right! It will be a totally new universe with a totally new "earth". And it will also include new relationships between different individuals. That is the time when Jesus Christ HANDS OVER CONTROL over the kingdom of God to God the Father Himself.

Then [cometh] the end, WHEN HE SHALL HAVE DELIVERED UP THE KINGDOM TO GOD, EVEN THE FATHER; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24)

No longer will those who were in the first resurrection be "the wife" of Jesus Christ. From then onwards Christ will be in the role of "THE FIRSTBORN amongst many brethren". From then onwards God Himself will be WITH us and be our God (Revelation 21:3) and we, who were in the first resurrection, will inherit

ALL THINGS (Revelation 21:7) with Jesus Christ, thereby becoming "joint-heirs" of God with Him. Those who were "the Wife" up till that time will have become "brothers and sisters" to Jesus Christ.

At present Jesus Christ is sitting ON THE RIGHT HAND of God the Father in heaven (Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 10:12). This amounts to sitting with the Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21). But during the millennium Jesus Christ will NOT sit with the Father on the Father's throne. The Father will remain in heaven for that period of time, whereas Jesus Christ will be here on earth.

But when the Father comes to the new earth with the New Jerusalem, THEN Jesus Christ will AGAIN sit with the Father on the Father's throne. That is why in Revelation 22 it is called "the throne of God AND of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1, 3). Christ does so (i.e. sit with the Father on His throne) because Christ will "inherit ALL things".

To be an "heir of God" (Rom. 8:17) means to inherit all that God owns. The throne in the New Jerusalem is shown to be the source of all power! It is the source of the river of the water of life.

God will have achieved His goal of truly reproducing Himself! When we understand it correctly, THAT was God's intention in creating the process of PHYSICAL reproduction in the first place. God created the whole process of physical reproduction BECAUSE it is His goal to achieve a reproduction of Himself on the SPIRITUAL level. Think again about Romans 1:20.

THE PEOPLE FROM THE MILLENNIUM AND FROM THE 100-YEAR PERIOD

In Revelation 3:21 Jesus Christ is very specific. It is the people who "OVERCOME" that will sit with Christ on His throne during the millennium. We in God's Church have at different times applied the term "to overcome" to different things, including "overcoming the world" and "overcoming self". But the use of this word here is very specific ... it refers to "overcoming SATAN", overcoming THE adversary. Notice:

After telling us that Satan is the accuser of the brethren in Revelation 12:10, we are told in the very next verse:

AND THEY OVERCAME HIM by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (Revelation 12:11)

During the millennium Satan is bound. The people who live then will not be required to overcome Satan. Satan is loosed very briefly after the 1000 years to round up and outwardly identify the rebels, who will be destroyed. Then he is bound again, this time for good! It is not a matter that those who did not rebel during Satan's brief freedom really "overcame" Satan; their lives under the rule of Jesus Christ had convinced them of the value of God's way of life and they simply did not respond to Satan's brief opportunity to broadcast his attitudes. Once Satan is bound again the second resurrection takes place; and those people also are not required to overcome Satan.

Thus "THE CHILDREN" who are produced by the marriage between Jesus Christ and the firstfruits will NEVER have been required to really "OVERCOME" Satan! This means that these "children" will not have the same depth of character conviction that their "parents" (i.e. Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection) had to develop. Actively and repeatedly RESISTING Satan's temptation over an extended period of time DOES have an impact on one's character. Obedience and faithfulness to God in the face of strong temptations is of great value in the sight of God.

At the completion of the time allotted to this process, they will be changed into spirit beings which are identical to their "parents"; i.e. they become the same type of spirit beings that Jesus Christ and the

firstfruits are / will be. But it seems that, because of this lack of experience (in overcoming the attitudes and temptations of Satan), God is going to give them "a lower level of access" to His power than He gives to those who will be in the first resurrection.

This seems to be indicated by the description that they "STAND" before the throne of God the Father and of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 7:9). Their positions within God's Family will not in any way require more power than they have access to.

Understand that God does not vest power in any individual just to make that person feel great or important! There is always A REASON WHY God does everything. To everything there is a purpose. So there is a reason why God gives those who will be in the first resurrection a higher degree of access to His power (i.e. to the Holy Spirit). It is for a very specific purpose. It is very closely tied to THE RESPONSIBILITIES that God places on those who have this greater access to power.

Now those who will be changed into spirit beings at the end of the 100-year period, i.e. just prior to the lake of fire destroying everything on earth, are going to comprise an incredibly VAST number of people. They will all be a part of God's Family. But God will structure this vast group of "sons and daughters" into "nations". This is God's way of bringing order into His incredibly vast Family. So at the time of the New Jerusalem we are told:

And THE NATIONS OF THEM WHICH ARE SAVED shall walk in the light of it: AND THE KINGS OF THE EARTH do bring their glory and honour into it. (Revelation 21:24)

Those in the first resurrection will ALL live in the New Jerusalem, the incredibly vast capital city for the kingdom of God. That is what is meant by saying that all those in the first resurrection will have the name of the New Jerusalem, the city of God the Father, written on them (see Revelation 3:12). The New Jerusalem will be inhabited by the SPIRITUAL nation of "Israel", which literally means "those who as rulers have POWER WITH GOD" (see Genesis 32:28), i.e. those with whom God SHARES His power.

All of these "nations" into which God will structure His Family will live in other cities all over the new earth. And since God is a God of order, it means that in each of these "nations" God will have some hierarchy to represent His authority. The ones God places in charge over each of these "nations" will be "the kings of the earth" who come to the New Jerusalem to God the Father.

Those who LIVE IN the New Jerusalem have a higher standing with God the Father than those who live elsewhere and who have to come to the New Jerusalem to bring their "glory and honour into it".

Above I mentioned different levels of access to the Holy Spirit, the power of God. Let me speculate a little. Here is what it may perhaps be like?

A) The throne of God the Father is THE SOURCE of God's power. It is from this throne that it "flows out" (Revelation 22:1). This level of access to that power was described by Jesus Christ as follows:

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, OUT OF HIS BELLY SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER. (John 7:38)

So in some way those in the first resurrection also become A SOURCE of "living water", of the Holy Breath or Spirit.

B) Those who become a part of the Family of God as a result of the millennium and the 100-year period

have a somewhat lower level of access. It is specifically for THEIR benefit that the river of the water of life will produce the tree of life. This tree of life is for the benefit of these "nations of them which are saved", though not by any means "exclusively" for them (this is also mentioned in the rewards to the Ephesian era, Revelation 2:7).

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, [was there] the tree of life, which bare twelve [manner of] fruits, [and] yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree [were] FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS. (Revelation 22:2)

Here the word "healing" does not refer to healing from physical sicknesses. Rather, it means the leaves and the fruits are FOR THE BENEFIT of these "nations". This is the way God has planned to give this group ACCESS to the power of the Holy Spirit. They will receive access to the same power that those in the first resurrection receive access to ... but they just receive this access IN A DIFFERENT WAY! In their case THEY need to put out effort to constantly renew the levels of this power in their lives. In other words, they will need to constantly and regularly seek contact with God the Father, whereas those in the first resurrection have that regular contact as an automatic part of their existence ... they had to put out more effort during their human lifetimes.

So, as spirit beings, those from the millennium will be identical to God the Father, to Jesus Christ and to those in the first resurrection. Where the difference apparently lies is that they will INHERENTLY have LESS POWER than those in the first resurrection. They do have FREE ACCESS to the same power, but they need to put forth effort to avail themselves of it.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

When God the Father comes to the new earth, Jesus Christ presents "His wife" and "their children" to God the Father. That is what is meant by Christ "delivering up the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24). Then relationships are changed. Jesus Christ will change from His role as "Husband" to the role of "the firstborn of many brethren" and the "Wife" will change her role to that of being younger (i.e. second-born) brethren and also joint-heirs with Christ. They may also continue to be known as "the firstfruits" unto God?

Understand WHY this change in relationships is required! The role of "firstborn of many brethren" does not make sense in the absence of "a Father". So that role does not apply during the millennium when the Father is not present. But as soon as the Father comes to the new earth, THEN the Father becomes the focus of attention and THEN we enter a relationship of "sons of God" and younger brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Then our previous relationship to Christ as "His Wife" fades into the background.

I don't mean to imply that we were not "the sons of God" all along. We certainly were. But different relationships are highlighted at different times.

The "children" from Christ's marriage will become the children of God the Father. And then Christ receives "A NEW BRIDE". This one is somewhat symbolical, though.

It is THE NEW JERUSALEM which from then onwards will be considered to be "the bride" and "the Lamb's wife". Notice:

And I John saw the holy city, NEW JERUSALEM, coming down from God out of heaven, PREPARED AS A BRIDE adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2)

In this verse the New Jerusalem is "compared to" a bride for Christ. It is "the bride" that the Father brings back with Him for His firstborn Son. A few verses further on it becomes more specific. Notice verses 9-10:

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee THE BRIDE, THE LAMB'S WIFE. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me THAT GREAT CITY, THE HOLY JERUSALEM, descending out of heaven from God, (Revelation 21:9-10)

This is more specific in stating that "the Holy Jerusalem" is "the Bride" and "the Wife of the Lamb". So why this change of "wives" for Jesus Christ?

First of all, the New Jerusalem is where those who had been Jesus Christ's "Wife" until that time will reside. All of those, and only those, who constituted "the Wife" of Christ will be the permanent citizens of that city (obviously in addition to God the Father). So there are no new "persons" or "beings" that will become a part of Christ's "Bride".

Secondly, from then on there is a different focus to that which existed before the Father came to this earth. No longer will the focus be one of leading mortal beings towards salvation. Instead, the focus will be on SERVING and PROVIDING FOR those who will have attained unto salvation. This is spelled out in two places for this group who join God's Family at this later time. Notice Revelation chapters 21-22:

And God shall WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS from their eyes; and there shall be NO MORE DEATH, NEITHER SORROW, NOR CRYING, NEITHER shall there be ANY MORE PAIN: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

And the city had NO NEED OF THE SUN, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb [is] the light thereof. (Rev. 21:23).

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, [was there] the tree of life, which bare twelve [manner of] fruits, [and] yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree [were] FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS. (Revelation 22:2)

AND THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE; and his name [shall be] in their foreheads. (Revelation 22:4)

This same group is also referred to as "A GREAT MULTITUDE WHICH NO MAN COULD NUMBER ...", a Scripture we looked at earlier.

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, STOOD BEFORE THE THRONE, AND BEFORE THE LAMB, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; (Revelation 7:9)

This ("before the throne and before the Lamb") is the same terminology as in Revelation 22:1,3. It is only in the New Jerusalem that ANYBODY will be able to stand "before the throne of God and before the Lamb". That is simply NOT POSSIBLE at any time prior to the time of Revelation chapter 21.

And the things that are said to this incredibly vast multitude are the same things that are said when the Father comes to this earth. Notice:

THEREFORE ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, and serve him day and night in his temple: and HE that sitteth on the throne SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM. (Revelation 7:15)

Revelation 21:3 says the same thing ... that God the Father ... "will DWELL WITH THEM". That is something the Father has never done up to that point in time!

They shall HUNGER NO MORE, NEITHER THIRST any more; neither shall the sun light on them, NOR ANY HEAT. (Revelation 7:16)

In other words, no more sorrow or pain, like Revelation 21:4.

For THE LAMB which IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, and shall lead them UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS: and God shall WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

At that point Jesus Christ will again be "in the midst of the throne of God the Father". The "living fountains of waters" is a very clear reference to Revelation 22:1. And "wiping away all tears" is again something that happens at the time the Father comes to this earth (Revelation 21:4). The matter of "feeding them" is what the tree of life in Revelation 22:2 is for.

This focus in both, Revelation 21-22 and also with the great multitude in Revelation 7 is NOT "on ruling". The focus in BOTH passages is on providing for needs, assuring comfort and well-being, removing all possible sources of sorrow, caring for the individuals involved, etc..

THE FOCUS IS ON SERVING!

This focus on serving, on meeting the "needs" of the "children" that were produced over 1100 years, on ensuring that everything for their well-being is provided and taken care of, this focus is epitomized by the New Jerusalem, which will be the capital city for the entire Family of God, and from where every blessing will originate. It is where the river of life comes from; it is where the tree of life is found; and it is where the entire Family will bring their glory and honour. No longer will the focus be on leading more individuals towards salvation and towards a relationship with God. That phase of God's plan will be past, during which phase the firstfruits had been "the Wife". Now it will be a matter of providing (like a mother) for the well-being and the enjoyment of an established Family ... and that is the main purpose of the New Jerusalem.

I think we need to keep in mind THE SIZE this city will have. At the base it will be almost 1500 miles square. This means that the surface area at the base will cover more than 8 times the size of the entire state of Texas! It will be almost two thirds of the size of the continental United States of America. When we then consider THE HEIGHT that this capital of the entire universe will have (i.e. also almost 1500 miles high or 250 times as high as Mount Everest!), then we should realize that the Almighty God of this universe does not think of "cities" in human terms! Even the scope of this city is really beyond our comprehension. Very likely the new earth will also be larger than the present earth?

That city will have only 144000 permanent "citizens" (in addition to God the Father and to Jesus Christ), who will have the name "New Jerusalem" written on them (see Revelation 3:12). It seems that God designed the city large enough to accommodate "Family reunions", when the entire Family of God will appear in the presence of the Father at the same time. The city surely MUST include all kinds of

facilities, given its vast size. And so God refers to this vast city as "the Bride" and as "the Wife of the Lamb". Even in the book of Galatians the Apostle Paul used a similar picture, when he said that ... "JERUSALEM WHICH IS ABOVE is free, which IS THE MOTHER OF US ALL" (Galatians 4:26).

DIFFERENT "GLORIES"?

Earlier we looked at 1 Corinthians 15:41.

[There is] ONE GLORY of THE SUN, and ANOTHER GLORY of THE MOON, and ANOTHER GLORY of THE STARS: for [ONE] STAR DIFFERETH FROM [ANOTHER] STAR IN GLORY. (1 Corinthians 15:41)

Think about this statement for a while. What is Paul referring to? He is speaking about what we will be like when God changes us into spirit beings at the resurrection, as he makes clear in the next verse.

Notice:

SO ALSO [IS] THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: (1 Corinthians 15:42)

In plain language, Paul tells us that THOSE WHO WILL BE RESURRECTED BY GOD will have different types and/or degrees of "glory". Is that how you understand these verses?

Now exactly what does Paul mean by "GLORY"?

The Greek word "doxa", which is used here, has a range of meanings. It basically refers to honour resulting from a good opinion; hence glory, majesty, etc.. The clearest way to understand this, though, is to examine the content of this verse itself. That shows us exactly what Paul meant.

Exactly what "glory" does the sun have? It is A SOURCE of brilliant light, which it radiates in a never-ending process. What "glory" do the stars have? They have exactly the same glory as the sun, but (from our perspective here on earth) on a smaller scale. What "glory" does the moon have? The moon also radiates light, but in a different way. The moon is not the source of the light which it radiates; the moon only REFLECTS the light which it received from the sun.

What should be clear is that all of the "glories" this verse refers to have to do with "RADIATING LIGHT"!

So what can we learn from this verse about "the glories" which different spirit beings will have in the resurrection? We can note the following things:

1) THE SUN is the most brilliant of all (from our perspective on earth). It is A SOURCE of a never-ending supply of light and power, which is essential for life on this earth.

2) THE STARS are exactly the same type as the sun. They have the same type of "glory" as the sun, but to a far lesser degree. Also, they differ from one star to the next in degree of "glory" ... some are brighter than others.

3) THE MOON has a totally different TYPE of "glory" from the sun and the stars. The moon is not a source of "glory" itself; it only REFLECTS the "glory" which it receives from the sun.

We understand that Paul was writing these verses under inspiration from God. So it is GOD who approved of this way of explaining the resurrection to spirit life. This brings us once again back to some of the questions we asked earlier. With God what actually came first?

Specifically:

DID GOD CREATE TWO TYPES OF HEAVENLY BODIES WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF "GLORIES" BECAUSE HE HAD PLANNED THAT HIS FAMILY WOULD INCLUDE INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFERENT SOURCES OF POWER ... OR DID GOD FIRST CREATE THIS UNIVERSE WITH STARS AND PLANETS AND THEN DECIDE THAT THAT IS A GOOD WAY TO EXPLAIN TO HUMAN BEINGS WHAT HIS FAMILY WILL BE LIKE?

What came first?

When God created this universe, He created stars which always give off light and power. The power they radiate comes from within themselves. They do not receive their light from outside sources. But at the same time God also created planets, which have no inherent sources of light of their own. Yet they are capable of receiving and reflecting light from another source; and, given the right circumstances as on our planet Earth, this light they receive from an outside source is sufficient to sustain and promote life! And yes, our moon does have a type of "glory", but it is not an independent glory like that of the sun and of the stars.

It seems very likely that our solar system is NOT THE ONLY ONE which has planets and moons around some of these planets. It does in fact seem quite likely that there are actually far more planets in existence than there are stars. WHY did God plan His creation this way ... with the heavenly bodies that depend on outside sources of light and power (planets and moons) far outnumbering those bodies that are totally independent sources of light and power themselves (the stars)?

We are to learn about God's plan and God's intentions by looking at the universe. We are familiar with David's statements in the Psalms:

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. (Psalm 19:1)

WHEN I CONSIDER THY HEAVENS, the work of thy fingers, THE MOON AND THE STARS, which thou hast ordained; (Psalm 8:3)

David understood about God's plan to crown man with glory and honour by looking at the universe (Psalm 8:4-5). Today we have a better understanding of "the heavens" than people had at the time of David. Thus we should be able to appreciate even more how the heavens reveal God's plan for mankind.

LET'S PUT THE WHOLE PICTURE TOGETHER

Now let's see how this might perhaps tie in with the whole picture.

1) God the Father and Jesus Christ have always existed. They have a "breath", a POWER that constantly and permanently radiates out from them, even as our sun constantly gives off a brilliant light. That power or "breath" is called "the Holy Spirit". In their "glory" they are like the sun, with God the Father having a greater glory than Jesus Christ. Christ clearly said: "My Father is greater than I" (John

14:28).

2) Those in the first resurrection will inherit all things with Jesus Christ. We will sit with Christ on His throne, the source of all power during the millennium. So those in the first resurrection will receive a glory like the stars ... the same TYPE of glory as Jesus Christ and the Father have, but to a smaller degree. Also, all those in this first resurrection will differ in degree one from the other.

3) Those who become God's sons and daughters through the millennium and as a result of the second resurrection will receive a glory like the moon. That will be a different type of glory from those in the first resurrection. They will not have that glory inherently in themselves, but they will receive it from "the sun"; i.e. they are BEFORE the throne of God and they have access to the tree of life and to the water of life. They do have "a glory", but it comes from an outside source.

IN CONCLUSION

This article is certainly not intended to be the final word on the subject of God's plan and God's nature. Not at all.

My goal has been to try to put together the things that seem to me to be clear, or at least to be likely. Are there still questions and difficulties? Yes. But are we hopefully getting closer to the correct answers? I think so. You may still think of very valid questions that challenge some of the thoughts I have put forward. That's fine. And if they happen to be the right questions, they may even lead us still closer to the correct picture.

Consider the things I have tried to bring to your attention in this article:

1) All human beings, including us in God's Church, have been deceived by Satan; and to some degree we still ARE deceived by him. A major method of deception is to change the meaning of words, so that the original meaning is obscured and hidden.

2) We looked at the words for "spirit", as well as "family-words" that God uses in reference to Himself and His plan.

3) Romans 1:19-20 is a very important passage to understand. It tells us that the creation of man reveals information about the Godhead.

4) It is important to ask the right questions. They can lead us to the right answers. One of the most basic questions to ask in this regard is: WITH GOD WHAT CAME FIRST? The details of the whole plan of salvation OR the physical creation, of which we are a part?

5) John 1:1-3 makes very clear that currently there are TWO members in the Godhead, or in the Family of God, and that the Holy Spirit is certainly not a person or a personality. It really is THE POWER of God, which emanates from God, much like light radiates out from the sun. Therefore God refers to it as His "Breath".

6) Our human potential is to become the children of God through a spiritual birth at the resurrection. Those in the first resurrection God has called for the purpose of becoming joint-heirs with Jesus Christ of ALL things and all power ... to BE like God the Father and like Jesus Christ. Christ specifically mentioned that those in the first resurrection would have the Holy Spirit (or "Breath") flowing out of them, just like it flows from God the Father and from Jesus Christ.

7) After the millennium God the Father will "share" His throne with Jesus Christ. Together with those in

the first resurrection they will be the only permanent citizens of the New Jerusalem.

8) The baptism formula includes the phrase "into the name ... of the Holy Spirit" because it is THE POWER of God, which those that are baptized are going to be immersed into. It is that power which those who are baptized will receive.

9) The family relationships that are mentioned have different periods of application. Specifically, for the period of the millennium (plus the 100-year period) Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom and the Husband, and those in the first resurrection will be the Bride and the Wife. Those human beings that will be granted salvation later are "the children" which this marriage will produce.

10) Once God the Father comes to the new earth with the New Jerusalem, then there will be some changes in relationships. THEN Jesus Christ will be in the role of the firstborn of many brethren, and those in the first resurrection will be Christ's younger brothers and sisters. Together with Christ we will all be joint-heirs of God. At that time the New Jerusalem becomes "the Bride" and "the Wife" of Jesus Christ.

11) Those who become a part of the Family of God at different times will be given different levels of access to the power of God, or different methods of access. Those in the first resurrection will have the Holy Spirit flowing out of them like rivers of living waters. Those who are changed into spirit beings later will have access to this power from an external source.

12) The "glories" of all those who will be resurrected into the Family of God are illustrated by the glories of the different heavenly bodies. Specifically there is a difference between the inherent glory of a star and the reflected glory of the moon and the planets.

QUESTIONS I HAVE NOT ADDRESSED

I have not addressed questions about the angels! When God is called the Father after whom "THE WHOLE FAMILY in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:15), does this include the angels or not? What is THEIR destiny, the ones who have been faithful? WHY are they called "the sons of God" in the Book of Job (Job 1:6; Job 2:1)?

In Hebrews 1:13 Paul implies that they do NOT have the potential to rule with God?

But TO WHICH OF THE ANGELS SAID HE AT ANY TIME, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (Hebrews 1:13)

God has NOT put the world to come in subjection to the angels (Hebrews 2:5). Then again the angels are referred to as "stars" in Revelation 12:4. Is their part in the Family of God still undecided and does 1 Corinthians 6:3 mean that we in the first resurrection will become involved in the final decisions?

KNOW YE NOT THAT WE SHALL JUDGE ANGELS? how much more things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6:3)

Is there really a difference in the CHARACTER of the righteous angels and those who become God's sons through the period of the millennium and the 100-year period? Do the holy angels of God perhaps ALREADY RIGHT NOW have the same access to the power of the Holy Spirit that those who come from the millennium will receive later?

The answers to these and similar questions, which would require more speculations, are not really important right now. The point to bear in mind is that God has CERTAINLY planned ahead for the angels. And those angels who have proved themselves faithful will CERTAINLY not be punished or in any way disadvantaged because of the deeds of Satan and his demons. So whatever happens, God has most assuredly also planned something for them. They too will have an eternal future to look forward to. But the details of that future are not really clearly revealed. I certainly don't know the answers.

I hope I have given you a few things to really think about. Continue to study God's Word and get into the habit of asking the right questions. Happy Bible study!

Frank W. Nelte