

The False Gospel of Witness Lee and the Living Stream Ministries

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Witness Lee was born in China in 1905. He moved to the United States in 1962. Lee claimed to be an apostle who was leading and fulfilling “The Lord’s Recovery” of the church prophesied in books of the Old Testament like Nehemiah. He established the “Local Churches” by teaching that there should only be one church per city and to call a church anything other than “The Church in [Anaheim]” is fornication with the whore of Babylon.

The Christian Research Institute condemned Lee’s teachings in the late 70s. In 1977 E. Calvin Beisner co-authored an article for CRI [The Teachings of Witness Lee and the Local Church](#). You can hear a lecture by Walter Martin (the original Bible Answer Man who founded CRI in 1960) delivered sometime in the 70s here <http://server.firefighters.org/18000/18110.mp3> where he clearly lays out the heresies of Witness Lee and the Local Churches. There was also an open letter published online several years ago [An Open Letter To the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the “Local Churches”](#) signed by numerous apologists and Christian theologians.

In late 2009, the Christian Research Institute (which is now headed by Hank Hanegraff, who is plagued with controversy and criticism and whose proper succession to Martin at CRI is disputed) published a special issue of the Christian Research Journal simply titled [“We Were Wrong.”](#) The whole issue is an apology to the Local Churches and an explanation of how CRI was wrong and how the LC are actually “soundly orthodox.” Norm Geisler and Ron Rhodes wrote a response to the CRI piece <http://www.open->

letter.org/pdf/Geisler_Rhodes_Response_to_CRI.pdf to which Hank Hanegraaff subsequently wrote a response in the [latest issue of CRJ](#).

My Encounter

Members of the Local Churches, also known as Living Stream Ministries, are very active on college campuses. A friend of mine ran into them several times at Cal State Fullerton. She went to one of their meetings and eventually had a few of the members meet with her, myself, my wife, and another friend of ours several times over the last few months to hear them explain their beliefs. The goal was to understand what they believe and then determine if they were a Christian group or not.

Much of what you may find online for and against the group can perhaps be a bit confusing and maybe even a little abstract. My friend considered the possibility that it may all be the result of a language barrier between us and Lee's original writings. However, these meetings, along with further study of their writings, have made it very, very clear what these people believe – and it is not Christian at all. I'm writing this to give you an overview of what exactly the group teaches and how it is heretical. My goal is to teach you what the LSM Statement of Faith should teach you, if they were honest. I have not come across anything that summarizes the issue in this way, so I hope this may be of help rather than just spilling more ink on what has already been said.

Contrast

The title of my blog is contrast. If you look in the about page, you'll find the following quote:

*“When one author constantly criticizes other authors, the reader may be repelled by the negativism. Let it be repeated that **contrasting** views bring both sides into sharper focus.”*
Gordon Clark : [What is Saving Faith?](#)

When a group like LSM uses biblical language and biblical imagery, it can be difficult to discern the error because when you read what they write, you think they mean one thing, but they actually mean something else completely. Thus things became clear to me when I was able to see the negations made by LSM. This is the error of Hank Hanegraaff and those who are defending Lee and LSM. Rather than looking at the contrast, they have devoted all their effort to finding similarities. But what Lee and LSM believe becomes clear when they say what they do not believe. Thus this post will teach by way of contrast.

The Triune God

Much of the debate about Witness Lee's teaching is focused on his view of the Trinity, so I won't spend a lot of time discussing it. I encourage you to read Besiner's article and Geisler's article above.

The statement of faith on [the Living Stream Ministries website](#) says “God is eternally one and also eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three being distinct but not separate.” Sounds fine, but note what Besiner says in [this 2003 article](#):

Look closely. Notice that it doesn't say what the three are as “distinct”? What are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? Cabbages? Angels? Compact discs? Extensive reading in Witness

Lee's writings discovers considerable hesitation to affirm what Christianity has affirmed through the ages: that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, though they are one God, are distinct Persons.

For example, Lee says:

*The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three separate persons or three Gods; they are one God, one reality, one person... God is triune; **that is**, He is three-one. In some theological writings, the preposition in is added between three and one to make three-in-one. However, it is more accurate to say that God is three-one.*

Witness Lee, The Triune God to Be Life to the Tripartite Man (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1970), p. 48

Lee clarified what he meant by triune. He meant three-one, not three-in-one. And, to make sure people did not misunderstand him, he said he was teaching something different than the "traditional" understanding of the Trinity:

"The traditional explanation of the Trinity is grossly inadequate and borders on tritheism. When the Spirit of God is joined with us, God is not left behind, nor does Christ remain on the throne. This is the impression Christianity gives. They think of the Father as one Person, sending the Son, another Person, to accomplish redemption, after which the Son sends the Spirit, yet another Person. The Spirit, in traditional thinking, comes into the believers, while the Father and Son are left on the throne. When believers pray, they are taught to bow before the Father and pray in the name of the Son. To split the Godhead into these separate Persons is not the revelation of the Bible, but the doctrine of the Nicene Creed"

Witness Lee, Life Messages (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1979), p. 164

These quotes are both found in the Open Letter. The people I met with gave me a binder full of Lee's writings that corresponded to the quotes in the Open Letter. Their intent was to show me the whole context of the quotes. I'm not certain what they thought that would prove however, since none of the quotes were taken out of context. The context only worsened what Lee was communicating.

When I spoke with the Local Church members, they continually insisted that the Triune God is distinct, but not separate. They would then explain that by "not separate" they mean "The Son is called the Father; so the Son must be the Father." And "the Lord Jesus is the Spirit." But when the London Baptist Confession says the Triune God is not separate, it means

"the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning,

therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations.” [LBC 2.3](#)

Other examples include the French Confession of Faith (1559)

*the three persons **not confused**, but distinct, and yet not separate, but of the same essence, equal in eternity and power.*

Or

*We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature...Notwithstanding we believe and teach that the same immense, one and indivisible God is in person inseparably and **without confusion distinguished** as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
[The Second Helvetic Confession, Ch 3](#)*

I shouldn't even have to provide these examples as proof. Witness Lee already clarified himself that his view was different from the traditional view and that it was not Nicene. No orthodox statement of the Trinity ever says “not separate” means the Son is the Father and the Son is the Spirit. So again, the Local Church uses biblical and traditional language, but mean something entirely different by it.

But my purpose here is not to address each issue in depth, but rather to show how each issue works together to create a false gospel. I encourage you to read the Open Letter, as well as Beisner's and Geisler's articles to understand more.

The Processed God

The way LSM attempts to defend their view is to say *ontologically* the three members of the Trinity are distinct, but *economically* they are all one. However, LSM misunderstands what those terms mean and therefore misapply them. In his response to CRI, Norm Geisler notes:

The “operational [economic] Trinity” is, at best, only a way of speaking about the one and only essential Trinity's activities, not His essential Being. But even here when one member of the Trinity acts in the world, He is still distinct from the other members, even if they are co-acting with Him. For example, when co-authors such as ourselves mingle our minds and act together by co-authoring the same thoughts and words in the same book, we are still in this action two different persons. And no such co-action justifies anyone calling Ron “Norm,” or calling Norm “Ron.” We are two really distinct persons with different names.

Using this artificial distinction, Lee and LSM teach what they call a “Processed God.”

The Bible reveals that God is immutable in His essence and that God has been processed in His economy. As the processed God, the Triune God has passed through crucial and interdependent steps in the divine economy in order to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people...God's process ultimately is related to becoming flesh through incarnation and becoming the life giving Spirit through resurrection.

[Our Unchanging, Processed God](#)

First in this process is the Triune God becoming flesh. Jesus Christ is not the Second Person of the Trinity. Instead,

"the Christ in whom we believe is the center of the Triune God." Because of this, "the Triune God became mingled with man... He is not only the Triune God, but also a man... He is the Triune God mingled with man. Therefore, He is the Triune God-man.

*Witness Lee, The All-Inclusive Spirit of Christ
(Los Angeles: The Stream Publishers, 1969), pp. 8-11*

According to our thinking the Son became flesh and the Son was the One who was manifested in the flesh. The Bible, however, tells us that the Word became flesh and that the Word was God. John 1:1 does not say that the Word was the Son, but that the Word was God. Do you believe that only one-third of God became flesh, one-third remained on the throne, and one-third was as a dove soaring in the heavens? The Bible does not divide God, the entire God, into thirds. Paul also tells us in 1 Timothy 3:16 that God was manifested in the flesh. This again shows us that the entire Godhead, the Triune God, became flesh... We believe that Jesus was the complete God and the perfect man. He was the Father, the Son, and the Spirit-man. He lived on this earth as the Triune God for thirty years...

*Witness Lee, God's New Testament Economy
(Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986), p. 230*

We firmly resist the notion that the Son was incarnated as a man separably from the Father and the Spirit

[A Confirmation of the Gospel: Concerning the Teaching of the Local Churches and Living Stream Ministry](#)

Second in this process is Jesus, the Triune God-man *becoming* the Spirit.

...When Jesus was glorified in resurrection, a change took place economically, not essentially, in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God, who is the eternal Spirit, became the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus.

...The Gospel of John is also the autobiography and history of the "journeying" Triune God, and the destination of the journeying Triune God is the human spirit of His chosen and redeemed people. The word journeying describes the Triune God in His economical move and work to accomplish His eternal plan (see God's Eternal Plan section below).

[Our Unchanging, Processed God](#)

In summary:

...This process can be summed up in three words: the Word, the flesh, and the breath. The Word is God, the flesh is man, and the breath is the Spirit. The Word became flesh, and the flesh became the breath to be breathed into man to make him a regenerated man of God with the breath of God. The Word became flesh, and the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. These two great “becomings” were the major processes of the journeying Triune God in His move in man to accomplish His plan (again, see below).

...The move of the processed God is centered on man. Whereas the Old Testament reveals God’s indirect move with man, the New Testament reveals God’s direct move in man. God’s move with man in the Old Testament was a typological preparation for His ultimate move in man in the reality of the New Testament. God’s move in man is to deify man, making man the same as He is in life, nature, and appearance but not in the Godhead for the glory of God, the expression of God.

[Our Unchanging, Processed God](#)

Mankind

Perhaps your ears perked up in what you just read about the deification of man. Man, according to Lee and LSM, is a tri-partite being made up of the body, the soul, and the spirit. Far from being a sideline theological debate between dichotomy and trichotomy, this is central to their faith. It is illustrated and emphasized in the introductory literature they hand out on campuses.

The spirit is a unique element within man. It was described to me as a baseball glove waiting to hold God’s life in it.

The man created in God’s image was merely an empty vessel. He could not express and represent God because he did not possess God’s divine life.

[A Defense of the Gospel – Response to an Open Letter](#)

Man, the highest created life, needs to receive another life for his completion.....The function of the human spirit is to contact God. Our spirit was made by God for the purpose that one day we would exercise it to contact Him and receive Him into our being.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

This brings us to another one of the key focuses of LSM. Lee says “Regeneration is the central part of God’s salvation.”

Regeneration

This is another point where it is crucial to understand what Lee and LSM mean by regeneration and not simply assume they mean the same thing as you. The London Baptist Confession describes regeneration as:

1. *Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed, and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.*

2. *This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature, being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins and trespasses, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit; he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead.*

[London Baptist Confession 1689, Chapter 10](#)

As a consequence of the Fall, man is dead in his sin, has a heart of stone, and is in rebellion against God. So God removes the sinful heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh that is no longer in rebellion. That is regeneration.

But not according to Lee:

God's purpose is that we may obtain His own uncreated life and be transformed by this life into His image to be like Him. Even if our human life had not been corrupted by the fall of man in Genesis 3, we would still need to be regenerated. In Genesis 1 and 2, Adam was without sin, yet he was void of God's life. Thus, God placed him before the tree of life that he might receive the life of God and be regenerated. God's purpose in creating man is not merely to obtain a sinless man, but even more to have a God-man, one who has God's own life and nature.

The Lord Jesus was very wise in using Nicodemus as the example of regeneration. If He had used the sinful woman in John 4 as the example, we might conclude that only sinful people need to be born again... the Lord revealed that regardless of how good we are, we still need regeneration. Regeneration is the primary need of man. Moral people, as well as immoral people, need to be regenerated. Some Christians hold the mistaken concept that people need regeneration simply because they are sinful and fallen. However, if Adam had never fallen into sin, he still would have needed regeneration because he was lacking the life of God.

...Since we are human beings, we all have human life. The question is not whether our human life is good or bad. Regardless of the kind of human life we have, as long as we do not have the divine life, we need to be regenerated. To be regenerated simply means to receive the divine life in addition to our human life. God's eternal purpose is for man to be a vessel to contain the divine life. We are earthen vessels to contain God as life (2 Cor. 4:7). This is the true meaning of regeneration.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

Lee and LSM mean something utterly different than Christians do when they talk about regeneration. For them, it is the process by which we are deified. The entire Triune God enters into our spirit and we become a new creation. No longer human, we are now God-men.

Lee describes how this process works:

The divine life received through regeneration is the seed of our new being. Speaking of the one who has been begotten of God, 1 John 3:9 says, "His seed abides in him." The seed here denotes God's life, which we received of Him when we were begotten of Him. This life as the divine seed abides in every regenerated believer. This seed is actually the Triune God Himself. In regeneration the Triune God was sown into us as the seed of life. The believer has the divine seed in his spirit. It is a marvelous fact that this seed of God now abides in us...

...A seed is a container of life. The word of God as the incorruptible seed contains God's life... God is mysterious and abstract, and for this reason it is difficult for us to receive Him. But the abstract, mysterious God is embodied in the word, which has been preached to us. When we heard the word and received it, we received God, who is embodied in the word. The embodiment of God in the word is the very seed of life sown into our being for our regeneration.

Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation

So the word of God is like a pill – something that makes the abstract, mysterious God digestible for us. It contains God in a digestible form. This happens through preaching.

The proper preaching of the gospel is the preaching not of a doctrine but of Christ, the Son of God, the One who is the embodiment of the Father and who is realized as the Spirit... The Christ who has been preached to them will become in them the faith by which they believe. (ibid)

At this point Lee changes the common phrase "believe in Christ," which means to believe what the Bible says about Him (that He is God and has ransomed sinners from the wrath of God) to instead say "believe *into* Christ."

...believe into the Lord...believe into His name...believe into Him...To believe into the Lord means to receive Him (John 1:12). The Lord is receivable...This faith creates an organic union in which we and Christ are one. The expression out of faith in Christ actually denotes an organic union accomplished by believing into Christ. The term into Christ refers to this organic union. (ibid)

Adoption

At this point we have become God-men, just like Christ.

Christ's resurrection was a birth both for Him as the firstborn Son of God and for us as the many sons of God...in His humanity He was born as the firstborn Son of God through His resurrection. (ibid)

Although the incarnate Christ was the Son of God by virtue of His divinity (Matt. 16:16), His humanity, that is, His human flesh, was not the Son of God—for, though sinless, it did not have divinity. To bring Christ's human nature into the divine sonship, God begot Christ in His humanity by imparting the divine life into His humanity in His resurrection.

[Piper's The Pleasures of God](#) (A review/critique)

In the same way that God begot Christ in resurrection, God has regenerated us to be His many sons (1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 2:10).

[Sproul's Saved from What?](#) (A critique)

We are literally the reproduction, the actual offspring of the Triune God. We are sons of God by birth.

By regeneration we refer to the organic process by which God makes us His children not simply by adopting us through the declaration of His sovereign decree but more intrinsically by begetting us through the impartation of His eternal life (John 1:12-13; 3:5-6; 1 John 3:9). We believe that, through regeneration, God becomes our genuine Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), and we become His sons genuinely, organically, and intrinsically, possessing His life and nature (1 John 5:11; 2 Pet. 1:4). Witness Lee understands deification as the full import of biblical sonship:

*Man cannot be God in His Godhead, but he can be God in His life and nature. We are what we are born of. Anything born of a dog is a dog. Likewise, if we were born of a monkey, we would surely be a monkey. God created man not according to a monkey's kind or a dog's kind, but according to His kind, in His image and according to His likeness. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that the believers in Christ are God's children (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2). The children of a man are also men. Because we are children of God, we are God in nature and in life, but not in the Godhead, **that is**, not in God's position or **rank**. (The Organic Union in God's Relationship with Man, 27).*

When we say that we are one with God, we do not mean that we become the person of God. This is to make ourselves an object of worship and should be condemned as blasphemy. To be one with God is to be one with Him in His divine life and nature. Every life produces offspring after its own kind (Gen. 1:11, 21, 24). As children of our physical father we have our father's life and nature, but we are not the same person as he is. A grandfather, a father, and a son all have the same life and nature, but they are different persons. In life and nature they are the same, but in person they are different. As the children of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1) we have been "deified," not in person but in life and in nature. We are one with God in His life and nature, but not in His person. (The Experience and Growth in Life, 209-210)

In God's new covenant (Jer. 31:33-34), we have been made God in His nature and in His life, but not in His Godhead. This is because we have been begotten of God (John 1:13). Dogs beget dogs; lions beget lions; and man begets man. Since your father is a man, and you are

born of him, are you not a man? As believers in Christ, we have been born of God; we have been regenerated by God. God is our Father, and we are His sons. Since our Father is God, what are we, the sons? The sons must be the same as their Father in life and in nature. We have been born of God to be the children of God (1 John 3:1). Eventually, when Christ comes, He will make us fully the same as God in life and in nature (v. 2). However, none of us are or can be God in His Godhead as an object of worship. In a family, only the father has the fatherhood. The children of the father do not have his fatherhood. There is only one father with many children. The father is human, and the children also are human, but there is only one father. In the same way, God is our unique Father; only He has the divine fatherhood. But we as His children are the same as He is in life and in nature. (The Christian Life, 133-134)

*The goal of God's salvation in the divine life is to build up the believers into the Body of Christ, the corporate and organic expression of Christ. We maintain that **the Body of Christ is not simply some apt metaphor** for the unity of the believers in the church but the spiritual and intrinsic reality of the church (Eph. 1:22-23)—**a divine-human organism** that encompasses Christ, the firstborn Son, as the Head and the many believers, the many sons of God, as the members of the Body (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27).*

[A Defense of the Gospel – Response to an Open Letter](#)

Because we are sons of God by birth, we are not sons of God by adoption. No one adopts their natural born children.

When we were born of our parents, we obtained human life. When we were born of God, we obtained God's divine life... When we have the life of God, we are the sons of God. The life of God gives us the right and authority to become the children of God (John 1:12)... Since regeneration means to be born of God, it automatically causes us to become the children of God (John 1:12-13). We are His children and He is our Father. The divine life we receive through regeneration is our authority to be His children.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

[Sproul] writes that "Jesus is God's only natural Son. All others enter His family through adoption in Christ" (110). Such a statement directly contradicts the revelation of the holy Scriptures, which tell us in unmistakable terms that we as believers have actually been born of God and are consequently His actual progeny.

[Sproul's Saved from What? \(A critique\)](#)

This came out in one of our meetings. The LSM members became very passionate as they told us how Christians have completely misunderstood what the Bible says about adoption. They explained at length the argument above, telling me I would not adopt my son when he was born because he was my son. When I asked them if they then denied the legal aspect of adoption they said "Oh, no, absolutely not. We completely affirm the legal aspect." I was thoroughly confused and had no idea how they could "completely affirm" what they were spending our whole time arguing against: adoption.

After I got home I did some reading and found out that I was very misled by these people. They do not affirm legal adoption at all. They actually argue that “adoption” is a mistranslation of *uiJoquesiva*, claiming it means “sonship” instead. They have absolutely no legitimate reason to do so based on the Greek meaning of the word, but insist that the Greek meaning simply does not fit with their understanding of regeneration, so it must mean something else.

*The language of regeneration in the Bible, being drawn from the natural realm of birth and growth, indicates that regeneration is a birth, not just a judicial procedure of adoption. To translate the term *uiJoquesiva* adoption (**according to its non-biblical Greek use**) rather than sonship (having the place and quality of a son) is misleading and inconsistent with the language of regeneration and the ability of God to impart His life into those whom He has created in His own image.*

[The Language of Regeneration](#)

For a good refutation of these claims, see <http://localchurchdiscussions.com/vBulletin/showthread.php?t=615>

Hopefully you can begin to see how all of these things work together in a chain, a system. Because Lee and LSM so passionately dispute the Christian’s legal adoption into God’s family, we must see how they view a Christian’s forensic, legal justification.

Justification

First off, for Lee and LSM, justification is a stepping stone. God justifies us so that He can regenerate us. Remember, regeneration/deification is the focus. Sin introduced an annoying speed bump along the course of “God’s journeying.” The title of [LSM’s critique of Sproul’s book](#) “Faith Alone” is called “Justification Alone” because “God’s judicial redemption as the procedure is purposeless without God’s organic salvation.” They criticize Sproul for focusing just on justification and not on the most important part of the gospel – our deification (organic salvation). Lee states:

“Through justification we have come up to the standard of God’s righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can impart His life to us” (Recovery Version, Rom. 5:18, note 2).

But moving on to the legal question – watch this video of R. C. Sproul explaining the gospel:

Lee and LSM strongly reject what you just heard.

It is not accurate to say, as Lutheran and Reformed writers usually do, that the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to our account. We do not have something called “the righteousness of Christ”; rather, as those who have entered into an organic union with the Lord by believing into Him, we have Christ Himself, the person, as our righteousness.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

Keep in mind what Lee said about “believing *into* Christ.” He said “The term *into Christ* refers to this organic union (deification).” Lee and LSM profess that we are justified by faith, but they redefine what faith is:

“This faith is not of ourselves but of Him who imparts Himself as the believing element into us that He may believe for us” (Recovery Version, Heb. 12:2, note 3). This means that for our justification by God, we believe in Jesus Christ through Him as our faith. Paul, therefore, speaks of “the faith of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:22)...

*...We would emphasize the fact that to believe in Christ is actually to believe into Him (John 3:15-16, 18, 36). When we believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe into Him. By believing into Him, we enter into Him to be one with Him, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us... Faith in Christ brings us into an organic union with Christ, and it is in this union that we are justified by God. If we would be justified by grace, by faith, and through the redemption which is in Christ, we must be in Christ, that is, we must be in Him as a realm, a sphere... **To be justified by God, we not only must believe Him or believe in Him—we must be in Him as the One who was resurrected to be our Savior... justification is not only a matter of faith in Christ but also of being in Christ through believing into Him.***

[Justification](#)

To clarify, they say that faith/believing is not an intellectual act of our mind/heart/soul with Christ as the object of our faith. No, instead, they say that Christ *is* our faith.

It is by means of our organic union with Christ that God can reckon Christ as our righteousness... We should not have a mere doctrinal understanding of justification by faith. According to the concept of some Christians, Christ is the just One, the righteous One, on the throne in the presence of God, and God reckons Christ to be our righteousness when we believe into Christ. This understanding of justification is not adequate.

...it is not unreasonable to say that faith is Christ. This is like saying that holiness, love, righteousness, patience, and endurance are Christ. Because the unique faith is Christ Himself, we who believe into Him have a common faith... The faith with which we believe is not ours but God’s. When the pneumatic Christ was revealed in us through the preaching of the gospel, He became the believing element and ability within us.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

My intention here is to show you how theology is systematic. You cannot alter one doctrine without it having an effect elsewhere. LSM understands this and have sought to work out the implications of their heretical view of God into all the other Christian doctrines:

It is my intention here, against the background of the classic forms of the doctrine thus far reviewed, to present a view of justification that respects the outlook of this journal, an organic view of God and His work in humankind... there is undeniably some dissatisfaction with the models of justification that have gone before, and these compel further consideration and refinement. In what follows, the studied reader will not find a wealth of innovation, except

perhaps in the definition of faith, but instead a reapplication of a number of notions previously presented. Luther will echo [though they misinterpret Luther], as will also Trent [Roman Catholicism], and Osiander will come alive again, hopefully with some needed correction. Who will not be heard, in their most austere and radical forms, are Melancthon and Calvin, and this, I hope, will not disappoint too many... Protestant justification, in the strident forensic form that Melancthon and Calvin pressed on their followers, is in many respects like the emperor's new clothes, which, even a child can see, leaves much to be desired for covering and propriety.

Justification of Life

So they are clear that they are rejecting the Protestant (Christian) doctrine of justification and replacing it with a new doctrine of justification that implements their heretical view of God and mankind.

Recall the video above. R. C. Sproul makes it clear that the debate of the Reformation was imputation vs. infusion. The Reformers argued that we are justified by the alien rightouesness of Christ imputed to us. It is something outside of us that is credited to our account (imputed). Rome, on the other hand, rejecting this idea and said righteousness is infused into our hearts, making us actually righteous. LSM attempts to form a hybrid between these views, using their newly invented (and absurd) definition of faith: infusion imputed.

We must say here, above the objections of the Protestants, that God infuses something into us for our justification, that is, the faith that justifies us. But for this we must understand the preaching to be something more than the simple delivery of gospel truths... It is important to realize that the faith infused into us through the gospel is not something different from Christ Himself; it is not some emanation from God into us. Rather, the Christ who is preached to us is infused into us through the word of the gospel. Faith is not merely a mental comprehension of the things preached but the apprehended reality of what is preached; it is the actual token of the things we believe.

Our believing in Him, initiated through the preaching and helped by His infusion within us, is indeed righteous because it is the first and only response within us that matches the real state of affairs with regard to the righteousness of God... for the first time in our lives there is a righteous and justifiable response within us... Contrary to the harsher forms of Reformation justification, this justification is real because it is indeed within the believer.

Luther described Christ's righteousness as something imputed to the believers for their justification, and this need not be rejected... the righteousness that He is, is imputed to us, not simply through some judicial transfer of merit but more profoundly on the basis of an organic union and the certainty of what that union will ultimately do within us... Because our justification, even in this initial, objective aspect, is not based on a righteousness that is external or alien to us, there is no need to speak of a forensic notion of justification, that is, the notion that God justifies us without any regard for what is within us... This objective justification is actual because there is righteousness within us, indeed the righteousness of the God-man in both His divine and human natures, and our union with Him allows us to possess His righteousness for our justification. In this sense, God justifies our organic union with Christ. Our initial justification does not require a forensic judgment on God's part because it is based on an actual reality within us. Further, our justification is not hollow or a mere "accounting trick," because while being based certainly and solely on the accomplishments

of Christ for our redemption, it also looks forward to what Christ will do within us as we grow in His life, are transformed, and are ultimately glorified.

Justification of Life

And in order to crystal clear:

Objective justification is actual because there is righteousness within us, indeed the righteousness of the God-man in both His divine and human natures, and our union with Him admits us into His righteousness for our justification. In this sense, God justifies our organic union with Christ.

*Objective justification is **not** forensic in the sense that it is based on a righteousness that is external or alien to us and is externally imputed to us by God without regard for any righteousness within us.*

Justification of Life

With one single word, LSM has denied the gospel. They have given a very clear definition of the gospel, and then entirely negated it with the word “not”.

In summary, LSM describes how their doctrine of justification fits in with their belief that God’s ultimate purpose in all things is to express Himself through God-men.

In the final analysis, justification is the great act of God to make us like Himself in the matter of righteousness... It is not God’s intention to simply justify us on a juridical level, to get us “legal,” so to speak; His intention is to gain in us a degree of righteousness that expresses who He is, so that He may be glorified in His righteousness through us.

...Why does God justify?... [A] profound desire that we become what He is in righteousness so that He may be expressed in all that He is. Justification, based on who He is and because of our living out of Him, proves to be the aspect of salvation as deification relative to His exquisite attribute of righteousness.

So God uses man, an empty vessel, to process Himself into God-men, in order to express His righteousness through us.

It is true that the Bible describes man as a vessel of God’s attributes – but not righteousness.

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory (Romans 9:21-23).

We are not vessels of God's righteousness, but of His mercy!

The Purpose of God

And so this brings us to the eternal purpose of God. Is God's eternal purpose the glorification of Christ in the redemption of His people, all to the praise of God's righteousness, mercy, and love? No:

Doubtless God rejoiced over becoming a man, for only this God-man could accomplish the redemption of God's fallen creatures... Yet, more significantly, in view of God's eternal purpose — formed long before the fall of man — God delighted in becoming a man to establish a prototypical God-man — a man who lives God for the expression of God in humanity. From the manger to the cross, Christ, the first God-man, unceasingly manifested God in His human living as the prototype for His believers, the many God-men, His mass reproduction (John 5:19; 6:57; 14:10).

...Pleasures neglects the crucial place humanity occupies in God's eternal purpose. Though correctly underscoring God's pleasure in His Son as the reflection of His perfections, the book falls short of underlining God's pleasure in humanity as the means of His manifestation... with regard to His eternal economy to enlarge His expression through creation, God longs to reproduce His Son in humanity as His enlarged corporate manifestation.

...From the creation of humanity to the culmination of the New Jerusalem, the entire Bible abounds with intimations that God's thought is focused and His heart is set upon humanity, for it is humanity that fulfills God's heart's desire for His corporate duplication and expression.

Nathan Betz : [Affirmation & Critique 2003.01](#), Review of John Piper's "Pleasures of God"

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The End

A thorough re-alignment of thought must take place in the Christian community concerning the definition and thus the experience of the salvation that God has prepared for us.

[Sproul's Saved from What?](#) (A critique)

the "Triune God and His regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified elect will be joined and mingled as one to constitute an organism as the enlargement and expression of God in eternity"

[Piper's The Pleasures of God](#) (A review/critique)

Some of Lee and LSM's favorite verses to quote to try to prove their heretical view of the Trinity (that the Son is Father) are John 10:30 "I and the Father are one" and John 14:10-11 "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Now, a valid objection to this false interpretation, and one that I raised, is that John 17:11 says that the Body of Christ is one in the same way that the Father and Son are one – so Jesus must be referring to

something else – namely, unity of mind. But some an objection does not phase LSM, because they believe that just as the Son is the Father, so also the Body of Christ is the Father.

The Son prayed that that those who believed through the preaching would be one, but He refined this oneness by making it equivalent to being in Him and the Father. He desired not just that we would believe the precious word of the gospel but that we would be made one through it, and this oneness is not simply a oneness of belief nor a oneness among the believers themselves but is more deeply a oneness that results from the believers being in the Father and the Son. Characterized in this way, this oneness that enlarges is the oneness that already exists between the Father and the Son. The Son prays that in the same way that the Father and the Son incorporate one another (“even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You”), the believers would also be incorporated into them (“that they also may be in Us”). Thus, this oneness is the enlargement of the divine and eternal incorporation to now include the believers and may be rightly called the divine-human incorporation (“I in them, and You in Me”).

...The Jesus of John, as we have seen, is not simply a man who happens to be God but God incarnate having a particular kind of human living that incorporates the entire Divine Trinity and who ultimately brings His believers into that same incorporate living.

[*The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity \(2\)*](#)

And here, ladies and gentlemen, we reach the Grand Finale of Witness Lee’s false gospel: the Processed, Four-in-One God.

Ultimately, the church is a group of people who are in union with the Triune God and are mingled with the Triune God. The Triune God and the church are four-in-one. Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we may say that the Triune God is now the “four-in-one God.” These four are the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body. Witness Lee, A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing p.203-204

Because the believers are incorporated into Him, He as the heavenly ladder serves as the personal bridge to the Triune God, incorporating in Himself the Divine Trinity and the believers. This is the very center of the universe, for in Him God and man are joined together, and the ministrations of God are focused on Him as this heavenly bridge. Within Himself He incorporates the unique enterprise of God’s economy, that is, the Triune God operating through Him by the Spirit in the believers for the manifestation and expression of God the Father on the earth.

...In this way the believers become the reproduction, expansion, and physical continuation of the incarnate and incorporate Son of God and indeed the organism of the Triune God Himself.

[*The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity \(2\)*](#)

The salvation of God is not primarily to save us from hell and to bring us into heaven, but rather to impart His divine life into us. By regeneration, we receive His divine life into our spirit. From our spirit, He is spreading into our soul by the process of transformation, and at His second coming, He will even saturate our body.

[Faith, Regeneration, and the New Creation](#)

New Jerusalem is actually a corporate person who includes the processed and consummated Triune God and, as the issue of God's complete salvation, all the chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, built-up believers in Christ.

[The Gospel in Romans](#)

A False Gospel

Witness Lee taught a false gospel and Living Stream Ministries continues to propagate that false gospel throughout the world. They have successfully stopped many publishers from exposing them by bankrupting them in lawsuits. Perhaps in [fear of facing such bankruptcy](#), Hank Hanegraaff led CRI on a multi-year journey to defend their teaching. If Hanegraaff and the others involved at CRI honestly believe that Witness Lee and Living Stream Ministries teach “sound orthodoxy” then they are just as damned as Lee. *Update:* Listen to this [account of Hank's experience with LC/LSM given by Minoru](#).

Side Note

On a side note, in my effort to clearly demonstrate the errors of Lee and LSM and show the contrast between their views and Christianity, I have to note how counterproductive Westminster Theological Seminary has been in this process. You can see just how necessary it is to clearly proclaim Christian doctrine in order to refute errors like Lee's. WTS has not done this. Instead, they have enabled their errors. First, their most praised former professor Cornelius Van Til argued “[We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person.](#)” In CRI's article, they note:

Lee's thinking was very close to that of the late Reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til on this point, and although Van Til has been criticized for his view, no one that I am aware of has charged him with heresy.

Likewise, LSM looks to WTS Professor Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. for a defense of their false interpretation of 1 Cor 15:45:

In his approach, he begins to probe the seminal importance of Paul's economical description of Christ – the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. Professor Gaffin forcefully addresses the hesitation within evangelical circles to engage Paul's utterance by arguing that 1 Corinthians 15:45 is at the center of Paul's pneumatology. He confronts the theological concerns that inform this hesitation by identifying the life-giving Spirit with the Holy Spirit... Gaffin points out that the principal concern is a reluctance to identify the life-giving Spirit with the Holy Spirit. The underlying base of this concern, however, goes much deeper because it seemingly places proponents of this identification at odds with orthodox understandings of both the Trinity and Christology, including Paul himself. Consequently, his utterance is often diluted,

rationalized, or ignored. Gaffin, however, does not ignore this verse.

[Gaffin's "Life-giving Spirit" \(review\)](#)

In contrast, men like John Robbins who have clearly and sternly proclaimed the gospel in the face of its deviations cannot be looked to for support by LSM. No, instead Robbins' proclamation forces them to confront the biblical gospel. For example, see [their defense of Gaffin and attempted refutation of Robbins'](#). May we all learn to stand firm in the face of opposition and clearly differentiate the gospel from its deviations the way that John Robbins did.

Comments

I appreciate all comments from anyone who desires to interact with what I have written here. However, all comments that are not directly related to what I have written will not be approved. The Combox is not a place for you to share your personal opinions and experiences that do not interact with what I have written.