

Man's Awesome Destiny

Life, for most of us, is filled with heartaches, disappointments, grief, and even intense pain. Even the person who “wins” in the game of life—the one who is born into a happy family, gets the best education available, lands the most rewarding job, marries the right person, has a happy marriage and wonderful children—must eventually face the reality of death. One is left wondering: Is this all life has to offer? Is it worth it?

Scripture quotations were taken from the New King James Version except as noted.

The cartoon was touchingly graphic, if somewhat tragic. A dejected, shabbily dressed and lanky gentleman enters his house with drooping shoulders amidst a ramshackle of a dwelling. Some malnourished kids are strewn on the floor. A melancholy, creased-faced wife stares with a blank look from the side of the room. “Honey, I heard some good news today,” he says, obviously at the end of a hard day. “We pass this way but once!”

Most men, a philosopher once said, “lead lives of quiet desperation.” And the well-known founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, once described the best efforts of his craft as “turning neuroses into common unhappiness.”

A somewhat crude bumper sticker puts it this way: “Life is hell. Then you die.”

What really is the purpose of life? Is there some transcendent meaning to existence? If God did create the world, what does He have in mind?

Was He simply lonely, so decided to create some beings who would just bow before Him every day in worship and adoration? Did God create man just for His own pleasure, even amusement? After a life of struggle, intense pain, frustration, repeated disappointments, sicknesses, and multiple disasters, what does man get at the end if he “wins”? And is it worth it? What will really compensate for the atrocities and hardships which he has had to endure for these millennia?

Is the best that human life has to offer really good enough? Think about it. You go to good schools and get the prestigious academic awards and degrees; land a prestigious, well-paying job that gives you the status and recognition that any person would crave. You get married, buy a posh home, possibly with some vacation homes in choice resorts. You buy the Mercedes or the Lincoln, even afford a yacht or a small airplane. You have some fine kids, who go on to make you proud. Life is absolutely terrific—until you are discovered with cancer or some rare disease. Your marriage falls apart; you are “re-engineered” out of your job and thrown onto the rubbish heap of unemployment.

What position would ever reach in life where you would feel totally secure, totally safe from harm? It is as if life is not designed to work. As one pop song says, “If it ain’t one thing it’s another.”

Even if you had a perfect life, you can’t keep it forever. You are going to die. All your achievements will one day mean nothing to you. Others might talk about them; but when you are in the grave, they will be of little use to you. What is life all about and what on earth is God doing?

In fact, look at the vastness and immensity of the universe. Does this little speck of a planet really matter, and is human life significant, after all?

Our universe contains fifty billion *galaxies*—not planets, but galaxies. Each one of these galaxies contains billions—yes *billions*—of stars like our sun. Our sun is in the Milky Way galaxy, which has 100 billion stars. Does God even know we are here?

No wonder the Psalmist asks, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:4).

It is easy to look at the immense size of the universe and say that man is really insignificant in the cosmos.

The Copernican Revolution radically shattered man’s self-importance by showing that the earth was not the center of the universe and that, in fact, the earth revolves around the sun, rather than the other way around. Our hagio-centric notions were crushed. Then Freud came along and showed that man was the unwitting captive of unconscious drives and psychological forces which render him, as the famed psychologist B. F. Skinner put it, “beyond freedom and dignity.”

Karl Marx came on the scene and told us that man was the victim of historical forces and was subject to the inevitability of history. Before Marx introduced his philosophy, Charles Darwin had convinced many that human existence itself came about through blind, random, evolutionary forces, and there was no cosmic design to our existence.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have not been particularly favoring to man’s sense of uniqueness. But the latest scientific discoveries are overturning some of the inferences from Copernicus.

It is now seen that rather than man being some insignificant part of a vast and majestic universe, the universe’s very design and creation had man in mind! The “Anthropic Principle,” developed by the brilliant astrophysicist and cosmologist Brandon Carter from Cambridge University, teaches plainly that all the seemingly arbitrary and unrelated constants in physics have one thing in common: they are precisely the values you need if you are to have a universe capable of producing life. In short, the laws of physics are fine-tuned to produce human life on earth. The Anthropic Principle derives from the Greek word *anthropos*, man. So man has regained a centrality which he lost five hundred years ago at the hands of Nicholas Copernicus.

The Anthropic Principle has gained a following from some of the most accomplished scientists of the latter twentieth century. The evidence for it is simply overwhelming.

There are four fundamental physical forces in the universe critical to the support of human life: gravity, electromagnetism, strong nuclear force, and weak nuclear force. Says the book, *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?*:

“Elements vital for our life (particularly carbon, oxygen, and iron) could not exist were it not for the fine-tuning of the four forces evident in the universe. We already mentioned one force, gravity. Another is the electromagnetic force. If it were significantly weaker, electrons would not be held around the nucleus of an atom. “Would that be serious?” some might wonder. Yes, because atoms could not combine to form molecules. Conversely, if this force were much stronger, electrons would be trapped on the nucleus of an atom. There could be no chemical reactions between atoms—meaning no life. Even from this standpoint, it is clear that our existence and life depend on the fine-tuning of the electronic-magnetic force.”

Let’s take just a few more examples:

- “Gravity is roughly 1039 times weaker than electron-magnetism. If gravity had been 1033 times weaker than electromagnetism, stars would be a billion times less massive and would burn a million times faster.
- “The nuclear weak force is 1028 times the strength of gravity. Had the weak force been slightly weaker, all the hydrogen in the universe would have been turned to helium (making water impossible, for example).
- “A stronger nuclear strong force (by as little as 2 percent) would have prevented the formation of protons—yielding a universe without atoms. Decreasing it by 5 percent would have given us a universe without stars.
- “If the difference in mass between a proton and a neutron were not exactly as it is—roughly twice the mass of an electron—then all neutrons would have become protons or vice versa. Say good-bye to chemistry as we know it—and to life.
- “The very nature of water—so vital to life—is something of a mystery (a point noticed by one of the forerunners of anthropic reasoning in the nineteenth century, Harvard biologist Lawrence Henderson). Unique among the molecules, water is lighter in its solid than liquid form: Ice floats. If it did not, the oceans would freeze from the bottom up and earth would now be covered with solid ice. This property in turn is traceable to unique properties of the hydrogen atom” (from Patrick Glynn’s *God: The Evidence—The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World*).

The intellectual force of the Anthropic Principle was one of the factors which convinced the former atheist, Dr. Patrick Glynn, who got his Ph.D. from the prestigious Harvard University, to reject atheism as intelligently untenable. In his book, *God: The Evidence*, Glynn says, “Ironically the picture of the universe bequeathed to us by the most advanced twentieth-century science is closer in spirit to the vision presented in the book of Genesis than anything offered since Copernicus.”

Glynn says, significantly—and this will be the thrust of this booklet—that the Anthropic Principle comes down to “the observation that the myriad laws of physics were fine-tuned from the very beginning of the universe for the creation of man—that the universe we inhabit appeared to be expressly designed for the emergence of human beings.”

Religion has not offered a rational explanation as to why this is so. What really does God have in mind? Just that man at the end will inherit immortality in human form? Is there something much bigger and grander in God’s design? Religion has not been able to come up with the correct answer.

What the Christian world is telling millions about that which God has in store for the saved is far inferior to what He really has in mind. Read on for the PROOF! Believe it or not, the Bible reveals that man’s awesome destiny is to *be like God!*

Could you please, at this point, stop reading and pray, for without the Spirit’s guidance we cannot come to truth. Truth might be aided by scholarship but does not come through scholarship. Conviction of truth comes through the Holy Spirit. There are many brilliant minds who do not and will not in this age understand God’s truth. Pray now for God’s divine guidance on this subject.

Admission

Let us make one significant concession at the outset: There is a sense in which the view that man will become God “as God is God” is clearly, demonstrably false. If essential to the very definition of God is eternity and self-existence—which it is—then man cannot, *can never*, become God, and any such view is patently absurd. Man is finite and contingent; God is eternal and necessary. So we could end the essay here by saying that this teaching is rank heresy and philosophical nonsense. But language must be understood in its context, and literary analysis has to—contrary to the deconstructionists—take into consideration the intent of the author.

What we have meant to convey is clearly captured in our famous phrase, “God is reproducing Himself,” and in our assertion that humans will become “God-beings.” We have not taught that humans, as God-beings, would take the supreme place of the Father, or knock Him off His throne. The Father and the Son will always be above deified beings. But we would be of the same species of being—for God is a species of being. The Father is right now over the Son quantitatively and hierarchically, but the Father and Son are equal in nature.

So let’s understand from the beginning: Man will not take the place of the Father and the Son and will never by any stretch of the imagination deserve the level of praise and honor as the Father and the Son. Deified humans will always owe all praise and honor to the two divine Persons who confer divinity on them. They will not be so arrogant as to want the same honor or homage. But they will be of the same nature, having the same divine magnificence.

So don’t resist this doctrine on the basis of fear that you would be taking away from God’s glory and praise. No, the Father and Son will stand out for all eternity for their indescribable love which made them decide to share power with pieces of clay.

Imagine this incredible love—this awesome, language-defying love and unselfishness. Here were two Persons existing alone for all eternity—and our minds can’t grasp eternity—and deciding at some point that rather than keeping all this power and magnificence to themselves they would create a race of beings, very low in status, just corruptible flesh and blood, and eventually, through a process of time and testing, bestow upon them their own divinity. This was a spirit quite the opposite of Satan’s. Satan wanted more power and honor than he had. He sought to get, not give. But Jesus, giving a clue to the divine nature, thought it not robbery to hold on to divinity but emptied Himself of it, veiled it while on the earth, and became a man in order that man might become God. This is love personified. If we reject this doctrine of deification, we shortchange the love of God!

Many times opponents of this truth of deification use semantics to override the truth of man’s real destiny. So we concede: Man obviously cannot be eternal and is not self-existent, so the incommunicable part of God’s nature cannot be conferred. However, this by no means disproves that God is reproducing Himself and that we will become exactly like God and Christ by nature and power.

Jesus’ Glory

To understand the truth about man’s destiny it is essential that we understand who Jesus really is. If Jesus is not God, then man can’t be God. John 17 clearly shows that

Jesus preexisted His human birth and possessed deity. (For a booklet proving the essential truth that Jesus had always existed, write for *Is Jesus Really God?*)

In John 17:5 Jesus asks the Father for the glory which He had before the world was. Recall that Philippians 2:5–9 establishes that Jesus gave up something when He became man; He gave up His divine glory, or, to put it in more precise theological language, His divine prerogatives were veiled during His earthly existence. Thus He could be hungry, tired, express lack of knowledge, and die.

So Jesus gave up His divine glory, which was His deity. But note. He asks the Father to give back that glory after His resurrection. “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself [or “in Your own presence”] with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

Acts 3:13 shows that the Father honored Jesus’s request and glorified Him. “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, *glorified* His Servant Jesus.”

It will be very important to define what we mean by the *glory* of Jesus Christ. Could it mean His divine transcendence and deity?

While it is true that there are a variety of meanings to the word *glory* (*doxa* in Greek), and that the Bible shows that man already has a form of glory, context demonstrates what particular meaning should be adopted. In the context of John 17, glory definitely means divinity and the powers associated with divinity, which Jesus gave up (Philippians 2).

Let’s turn to one of the most important evangelical scholarly sources today, the 933-page *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. Under the heading “Glory,” the dictionary says that the Septuagint version of the Old Testament gives the technical meaning to glory (*doxa*) as “honor intended for God, or the majesty or eminence which radiated from God’s own being.” Keep that definition in mind.

While the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) develop the concept of glory eschatologically, John, who wrote to prove the full deity of Jesus Christ, uses it to prove his theological point. For example, in John 1:14 he says we have beheld His glory. “Like Peter, John saw that Jesus was not a mere man, but was God made flesh, though his Divine powers were veiled.”

The writer of the article on glory makes the interesting and noteworthy point that John’s view, linking Jesus’s glory with His divinity, is “consonant with the view offered elsewhere where the divinity of the Son of God is inseparable from His glory (1 Corinthians 2:8; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 3:16; Hebrews 1:3; James 2:1). When the NT writers reached the conclusion that Christ was eternally one with God, it was left to John to sketch these results into the Messiah’s earthly life.”

So note the connection between Christ’s glory and His divinity.

Now, if later we will see that this very glory of Christ is to be shared with His saints—His being “the firstborn among many brethren”—then what but prejudice or emotional and/or cultural reaction would make us resist the necessary and logical conclusion that resurrected believers will be divine beings, too? Who is imposing his presuppositions on the text, the person who follows the clear direction of the text or the person terrified by the thought that he might be taking something away from God’s honor? Hebrews 1:3 is very significant. It says Jesus is “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” So the glory of Christ is the glory of God, which is the divinity of the Father.

The fact that man is not eternal and self-existent does not mean that man can never possess all the attributes of divinity by adoption. There is nothing logically impossible about this. It is only a philosophical presupposition about what constitutes the incommunicability of God, largely reflective of Platonic philosophy and Eastern mysticism, which would mitigate against this biblical truth.

Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus reflects the glory of God. The book of Hebrews was specifically written to an essentially Jewish audience to reinforce the divinity of Jesus and His superiority over the angels, Moses, and everything under the Old Covenant economy. In Hebrews 1, the writer establishes Jesus's preeminence over the cosmos and the angels.

Again, we acknowledge that glory can have a variety of meanings but we must use context to determine precise meaning.

A most fascinating essay appears under the title "Glory" in *The Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. Commenting on Hebrews 1:3, which says Jesus reflects God's glory, the scholar says, "The juxtaposition of *doxa* with *hypostasis* in the ontological characterization of Jesus clearly articulates Jesus' status. Jesus is God's glory, God's very being. This hymn/confession formed part of the author's strategy to distinguish between Jesus and the angels...Jesus is ontologically superior to any and all angelic agents; Jesus is equal with God; Jesus is God...The ritual of confessing 'Jesus as the glory of Yahweh' created and reinforced the boundary lines between Christianity and Judaism."

In his summary, the author states: "In the later New Testament writings and apostolic fathers, glory language is what G. B. Caird called 'bivocal'...That is, glory possesses both a subjective and an objective field of meaning. On the subjective side glory refers to the act of worship (i.e., 'give glory to God'; 'glorify God'). On the objective side glory denotes the object of worship (i.e., God's presence). Glory in both its subjective and objective senses evidences the development of the church's faith and practice. When glory began to be ascribed to Jesus within the church's liturgy and when Jesus was identified with God's glory in the church's confession, Christianity was well on its way toward Nicea and Chalcedon. Glory language was an important vehicle for conveying the Christian redefinition of God."

Nicea and Chalcedon unmistakably acknowledged the church's creed that Jesus was God and glory language reinforced that. Now, what is the implication of that same glory language being applied to human beings? What except recalcitrant prejudice and theological bigotry could cause serious biblical scholars to resist the conclusion that if Jesus's reflecting God's glory is a way of attesting to His divinity, then man's reflecting the glory of Jesus means just that, too?

Hebrews 2 shows that Jesus, like man, was made for a little while lower than the angels. This is the natural meaning of the text, which is to show Jesus' present superiority to the angels. The angels were above Jesus while He was a human being on the earth, but now that He is glorified He is above them—which is exactly what will happen when true believers are resurrected! Glorified humans will be above angels, not lower than them or even equal to them.

In fact, the writer to the Hebrews, after showing Jesus's likeness to the Father, goes on to establish the likeness of the resurrected saints with Jesus. If A equals B and B equals C, then how can we avoid the conclusion that A equal C?

Hebrews 2:10 says that “it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Jesus’ mission is to bring *many sons to glory*. This is the gospel! In what way is this glory distinguishable from the glory of Christ Himself, and why would we want to suppress this incredible truth? It is not a doctrine of devils, introduced by Lucifer in the Garden of Eden. It is not the mythical invention of some cult leader who founded his “true church” in the 1930s. It is the very revelation of God Almighty who loves you more than you could ever imagine and who has willed to share His divinity with you for all eternity!

Now turn to an even more startling and certainly indubitable text in 2 Thessalonians 2:14: “to which He called you by our gospel [this is vital to the gospel], for the *obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Now *what is* the glory of Jesus Christ? Whatever it is, it is exactly what we shall attain. The attempt to now limit what man will attain is disingenuous, if not dishonest! If you admit that the glory of Christ means His divinity; if you admit, as the two evangelical scholars (cited above) show that glory language is the language of divinity and it moved Christianity from a narrow monotheism, then why not accept the plain, logical conclusion that this divinity will be shared with mankind at the resurrection?

In 1 Peter 5:10 we have the unmistakable words from the pen of inspiration: “But may the God of all grace, who *called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus*, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” What? It is the Father who has called us to His Glory—which, as Hebrews 1:3 says, is the same glory of Christ. This means that the saints—those called and truly converted in this age—will, in the resurrection, be no less divine than the Father and the Son! Let’s not engage in semantical gymnastics about our inability to attain “the incommunicable aspects of divinity”—His eternity and self-existence. The truth is, God is reproducing Himself! He is conferring divinity on pieces of clay!

Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” This is future. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we “are being transformed into his likeness with ever- increasing glory” (New International Version). Romans 8:17 says that we are heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, which must mean that we have a stake in divinity.

Now there are some who say that our receiving the glory of Christ merely means that the character and righteousness which the first Adam failed to achieve because of sin will be restored in mankind at the resurrection. That is, we will finally achieve perfection of moral attributes—and this is what “glory” is intended to imply, not that man will become a God-being.

That sounds noble on the surface, but it is flawed, for Christ, despite His humanity, was perfect and had not a flaw in character. If the glory which He asked for was anything less than the divine power of His preexistence, then He would be asking the Father to give back something which He had in full measure and demonstration during his earthly existence, namely his moral perfection and sinlessness.

While His omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience were veiled on earth, His sinless character was not.

When Romans 8:29 says we are to be conformed to the image of His Son, some say this image is spiritual perfection and moral excellence—anything to dilute the full impact

of the marvelous truth that God is reproducing Himself. How man resists God, even when God wants to do him good!

We shall have the moral perfection, yes, but more than that. The Bible reveals we will receive God's glory, God's image, and God's body. Hebrews 1:3 shows that Christ is the express image of God. We do not limit the meaning of this description to moral qualities, so why would we place such limitations on the same term when it is used of humans? How else can we explain Romans 5:2? It states that through Jesus Christ "we have access by faith into his grace in which we stand, and rejoice *in hope of the glory of God.*"

What, in this context, restricts "glory of God" to something less than His very essence, His divinity? So why would we want to restrict it? Why not go with the plain sense of Scripture, unless there are indicators otherwise? Is this not a sound principle for understanding the meaning of any scriptural text?

Notice another point in 1 Corinthians 15:23: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." Have you ever noticed that Christ the firstfruits is not distinguished from the other fruits in the harvest? In the agricultural economy from which the analogy is taken, the firstfruits were of the same kind as the other to follow. It was not a different sort—only the firstfruits.

Isn't this analogy clearly suggestive and reinforcing of the point we have seen in Scripture that our gift of salvation is similar to the exaltation that Jesus received?

First John 3:2 says that when Jesus appears "*we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" Again, why restrict the meaning of "we shall be like Him"? We already look like Jesus looked when He came to this earth the first time. We already bear the image of God in a limited sense. This text obviously means that the resurrected saints will be *like Jesus* in a far greater way than any of us have experienced in this life.

Notice that we shall "SEE Him." This is not referring to His invisible moral qualities and His attributes, but what we can see as resurrected spirit-beings! It does not yet appear what we shall be for no one has ever achieved that status.

Philippians 3:21 says that Christ will "*transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.*" What else could this mean? We are to have bodies like Jesus's body! We are to have His glory. We are to have His image. We are to be like Him. He is God. He is glorified. He is Spirit. He is perfect and absolutely righteous. Yes, He is also eternal and self-existent, and we cannot be. But think about it! Our children are not the same age as we are and we begot them, yet are they any less our species of being because we have the age and reproductive supremacy over them?

Let us hold firmly to the powerful truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The Holy Spirit in us is the earnest of salvation, the guarantee that God is eventually going to bestow His divinity upon those who humbly submit to His will and accept His provisions for salvation! The Holy Spirit is just the earnest or down payment of this great salvation. We diminish God's great salvation when we don't proclaim this truth.

Common Objections

There are some common objections to the biblical truth that God is reproducing Himself. The most commonly repeated are found Isaiah 42–44.

Isaiah 42:8 says, "I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another." At first glance, this verse appears to contradict 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Peter 5:10; and other texts which clearly say that God will give His glory to others. But upon

closer examination it becomes clear that Isaiah 40–45 is a polemic against the false gods of the surrounding Near Eastern nations, and warning to Israel not to worship or acknowledge them. Israel was exchanging the glory and honor of Yahweh for the false gods of the nations which, as Isaiah says, are really not gods, but are useless, powerless, so-called “gods,” creations of men’s hands, unlike the eternal, omnipresent God. The passages are brilliant pieces of polemic.

Read the full text in Isaiah 42:8: “I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another; *nor My praise to carved images.*” The last words tell us clearly what is meant. God is addressing idolatry. He is saying that He will never share His glory with pagan idols and false gods. Romans 8:29 tells us plainly that He *will* share His glory with His human creatures.

Isaiah 43:10 says, “Before Me there was no god was formed, nor shall there be after Me.” This is a favorite among those who deny that man will eventually become God. But read the next three verses (and the entirety of Isaiah 42–45), and you will see clearly that this section is not discussing man’s destiny, but is condemning the use of false gods. God Almighty is saying that *He* is the only true God, and that the so-called “gods” of the heathen are nothing.

Incidentally, even the famed anti-cult expert Robert Bowman has stated clearly that there is a difference between polytheistic deification and monotheistic deification. The Mormon view that men can become gods is totally unbiblical and bears no resemblance to the view advocated in this booklet. Men will not become “gods” but, more properly, *God-beings*. It is not just a semantical difference, for while the Bible declares emphatically that God is one, it reveals that there is more than one member of the God-family (see again the booklet, *Is Jesus Really God?* for a thorough explanation). Humans will not evolve into “gods,” but will acquire divinity through the One who alone has the power to grant it.

So Isaiah is right—no “god” will be formed! But the one God, Yahweh, will reproduce Himself, adding many divine beings to His eternal family! There will be no “gods” forming independently.

These texts from Isaiah can in no way assail the undeniable biblical truth that God is reproducing Himself and will accomplish His purpose.

Another text frequently quoted and ripped out of context is Luke 20:36, which says that in the world of the future, saints will be like angels, neither marrying nor given in marriage. Now, no really serious biblical scholar could quote this passage to disprove the deification of man. If the doctrine is false, this text could never prove it.

What is the context of the discussion? It is about whether the sons of this age will marry in the next life (verses 27–34). Jesus, in saying no, compares resurrected saints with the angels, who are sexless beings, and says that in the future world glorified humans will be like angels *in that* they will be sexless beings. He does *not* say that the glorified saints will be like angels in *every* way; nor does He say that the saints will *be* angels.

As we have seen, other texts show clearly that the glory God intends to share with man far exceeds the glory of the angels.

Weak Texts

We of the Church of God movement have often given a less-than-adequate defense of this pivotal biblical doctrine. Some use texts like Revelation 3:9 and Psalm 82:6 to defend this doctrine. The Revelation text says people will come to worship at the feet of the saints. Ah, some have said, only God should be worshiped. In fact, the very book of Revelation has the writer, John, refusing to accept an angel's worship before him; so if we see people worshiping or bowing before the saints' feet after the resurrection, then they must be God-beings. Yes, that could be so, but it is an ambiguous text for the Greek word translated "worship" can mean simply to do obeisance or to show particular honor. Sometimes it does mean worship of a deity, but it is an ambiguous text and shouldn't have been one of the major texts used to prove the doctrine.

Weaker yet is the use of Psalm 82:6 and Jesus's citation of it as proof of the deification of man. The psalm, speaking to humans, states, "You are gods." This is an example of poor exegesis, for a simple, common-sense interpretation should say that if humans in the present tense are said to be gods, and we are clearly limited beings, then how could that text prove future deification? Besides, the term is used of angels and even human judges and kings.

A stronger text, but not sufficient to prove our case is 2 Peter 1:4, which says we have been given great and precious promises "that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature." An opponent could say that we have already become partakers of the divine nature—though not fully—through the Holy Spirit. Or, one could argue that the divine nature is simply godly character, which is comprised of love, patience, kindness, and so on.

Unfortunately, some have focused on these weak arguments and concluded that the doctrine of the deification of man is unscriptural and should be rejected. They fail to see that the real proof of this doctrine lies elsewhere in Scripture.

Others, however, resist the doctrine for different reasons.

Why the Resistance?

Some of the psychological factors influencing the resistance to the biblical truth that man will become God are understandable. There is a natural sense of awe and reverence for the uniqueness and majesty of God and the exclusivity of worship that is due to Him. That is right and proper.

At a time when New Age philosophy is strong, with the teaching that each of us is a "god" with the divine spark inside, it is necessary that biblical Christians raise their voices against this damnable heresy. Human beings are not inherently good and godlike. We are sinners in need of redemption and salvation from the clutches of sin. We receive goodness only through God, who is transcendent.

Besides, there are some charismatics with the equally damnable teaching that men are really "little gods," misapplying the Psalm 82:6 text, "You are gods." We are not little gods, and this carry-over from Gnosticism must be firmly resisted.

Also, traditional Christians are careful to maintain the distinction between the Creator and the creature.

"Evangelicals are determined to preserve the distinction between the Creator and the creation, particularly in light of Paul's teaching in Romans 1:18–32 that the heart of idolatry and rebelling against God is to worship the creature rather than the Creator," says

Professor Craig Blomberg in his jointly authored 1997 work *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical In Conversation*.

But if God's own revelation shows that one day He will take the initiative to share His glory with mankind (Romans 5:2), then we will be more than mere creatures.

The point is, we must not impose our own ideas and philosophy on the biblical revelation, but must accept it for what it is.

A most gifted evangelical scholar, Professor Craig Blomberg, in his debate with the Mormon scholar Stephen Robinson (*How Wide the Divide?*) asserts, "We can come to share perfectly God's communicable attributes, but can never usurp God's unique role by becoming all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present."

But notice the word "usurp," thrown in to create an emotional distraction and resistance. If God in Scripture clearly states that He has called us to His eternal glory, where does the "usurping" come in? Satan wanted to "usurp," but by God's grace man will *receive* deification. And notice that not one text is given to show that God cannot make us all knowing, all-powerful, and all-present. It is simply stated as a given.

It is only philosophy, not the biblical text or inescapable logic, which decides which attributes are communicable and which are not. Platonic philosophy is more influential here than Scripture.

Why would it be impossible for God to make us omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient? Why? By what logical law? What in Aristotelian logic would be violated? Would the law of non-contradiction be violated? Didn't Jesus change from humanity—full humanity—to being fully God?

There is a fierce theological and philosophical debate going on right now in evangelical theological circles about God, and many of the old assumptions are coming under sharp questioning. A lot of philosophical presuppositions have been imposed on Scripture and it is time that we put aside our traditions for the clear teaching of the Word of God. Paul says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy." As the brilliant evangelical philosopher Norman Geisler said in a *Christianity Today* article over twenty-two years ago, "You cannot beware philosophy unless you are first aware of philosophy." When you study philosophy you realize that these neat categories, "communicable and incommunicable," are man-made and not infallible. Why use them to judge Scripture, rather than the other way around?

Comparisons With Incarnation

The profound difficulty modern Christians have with the concept of deification is comparable to the problem the Jews and others had with the Incarnation in the first century.

The Incarnation was a problem to many who felt that the eternal, transcendent God could never stoop so low as to become man. Indeed, to this very day a key unitarian argument is that the unchangeable, eternal God could not become a man and die. God can't die, God can't change. Men impose certain categories on God and inhibit the biblical revelation. It is the same with the concept of deification.

The noted church father Athanasius put it well: "God became man in order that man might become God." Exactly right!

The Incarnation was a signal as to the intention of God to deify man. In fact, in the very creation account, the fact that the animals were made after their own kind but man

made after the image and likeness of God—the God-kind—allows us to catch a glimpse of God’s divine purpose.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ was a further revelation, and at the Second Coming the full manifestation of God’s plan will be unveiled.

In a brilliantly argued article in the July, 1996 issue of *Affirmation and Critique*, Kerry Robichaux says, “It appears that many Christians wish to protect God’s integrity: yet in a sense the greater risk to God’s integrity was taken in His becoming a man.

“The New Testament speaks of the Incarnation as an emptying (Phil. 2:7) and Christ’s death as his humiliation (Acts 8:33). That man may become God is not merely the elevation of man to the eternal plan” but the glorification of God Himself in man.

“It serves to magnify God, not to minify Him...But if we ignore the full provisions of His salvation and fail to enjoy the full extent of His communicability, we risk insulting Him in His grace and His economy.”

While the Protestants like to talk glibly about salvation, they take away from the magnificence of God’s grace and the magnitude of His salvation. To take the text slightly out of its original context, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” The churches neglect “so great a salvation” by not teaching people what God really has in mind. The Church of God has this truth. Shouldn’t your efforts be fully behind a church that teaches people this wonderful truth?

Which biblical truth is more important than this and which one really exalts the great God more than this doctrine which shows the incredible extent of His love? How grateful we should be to come in contact with a church that has this precious knowledge!

Kerry Rubichaux, in the *Affirmation and Critique* article, writes, “Therefore, when we speak of God’s salvation we ought to view it more broadly than modern Protestant Christianity. While Protestantism typically sees salvation and redemption as virtually identical, and therefore focuses on the suffering and death of Christ, we are compelled to consider God’s salvation as something much fuller as that which consummates in man’s sharing of God’s life, nature, and expression to become His genuine sons and, in kind, like HIM.”

The Incarnation was divinity brought into humanity and the deification at the Second Coming will be humanity brought into divinity.

The only barriers to accepting this doctrine are philosophical speculation (particularly Platonic philosophy) and Eastern mysticism, which posits the view that God is totally Other and inaccessible to man, dealing with us by intermediaries. Yes, the Scripture says God dwells in “unapproachable light,” but He will bring that light of His divinity to man who will then be one with Him.

The truths about the Sabbath, the holy days, the Kingdom of God ruling on the earth, the fulfillment of prophecy, the death of Christ, and His resurrection and ascension are all subsumed into what God really is doing in history and what really shows that “God is love.”

Thank God for this VITAL TRUTH! ☐