

The Communal Nature of God (& Humans)

Genesis 1

As I said last Sunday morning, in January and February, we are going through a series covering the Trinity and the nature of humanity being male and female. What a crazy topic, right? The Trinity is confusing, and in our society, to talk of gender as being only two can at times be considered hate speech. People could visit here or listen on-line and be upset for various reasons. Some could say, “Why are we talking about the Trinity. It’s too much for my brain to understand. Get practical.” Others could be upset on views of gender and sexuality, saying that what I’m preaching here is unenlightened.

Yet, for these very reasons I want to get back into the Scriptures and discuss the nature of God and the nature of humans. There is so much confusion in this world over who we are as people, as male and female – but the confusion isn’t simply a result of varying opinions. The confusion comes because of a suppression of God himself. If I simply did a sermon series on sexuality, while that could be appropriate, I could still miss the point. In Romans 1, Paul traces the problem of sin all the way back to people suppressing the truth about God.

Therefore, this series connects the nature of God – especially his Triune nature – with us as humans. Each week we will be building on various ideas of God’s Triune nature and then bringing application to us as male and female. But maybe you’re thinking, “But, why the Trinity?” Or, “Why does the Trinity matter?”

First off, because **God matters**. Today’s sermon is going to focus more heavily on Genesis 1. What’s interesting about this first book of the Bible is that it assumes God and highlights God as the main character. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”¹ Moses doesn’t argue for the existence of God. Moses reveals God’s reality before everything else. And, in this first chapter, the proper name of God is used 32 times in 31 verses! Do you think knowing God is important? Yes.

Second, because **knowing God matters**. The Bible tells us that the chief end of man is to fear God and keep his commandments. To fear is a relational term of respect and awe. We were created to *know* him personally. Well, if you don’t care to know him, that’s a problem, right? What does this have to do with the Trinity? Let me give a little bit of a different illustration. This past year, I hosted a birthday party for my wife, and at the party I created a questionnaire that asked questions about her. Now, of course I made the questionnaire, but I knew *all* the answers correctly. Hopefully, as her husband, I know more about her than anyone else. We’ve been dating for 22 years and been married 19 years this year. But what if I said to Tracy, “You’re just so confusing. I’m never going to fully understand you,” and then I never sought to understand her? Do I actually care about her? Do I really love her? No. Therefore, if God reveals something about himself – including his nature as being Triune – then this matters because God matters to us, and if you are a follower of Jesus then you have been set free to know and glory in God! So, the Trinity matters because God matters, and because knowing God matters. This leads me to a third practical points.

Third, because **people are teaching false views of the Trinity**. Last year, someone sent me a song by a professing Christian artist. It was a beautiful song, but something didn’t sound right to me. It sounded as

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:1.

though God was simply one – and not three persons. I looked up this artist on-line and went to their belief statement, did some basic digging – and guess what I found out? She rejects the Trinity. Honestly, this isn't too uncommon. TD Jakes is a part of the Oneness Pentecostal movement. His statements on the Trinity are wishy-washy, yet he is a part of the movement that denies the Trinity and embraces what has been known for centuries as heresy. The group Philips, Craig and Dean are Oneness Pentecostals. Now, in saying these names, I'm not just wanting to point fingers out at others. I'm saying this because of my fourth point.

Fourth, because **many Christians today seem theologically flabby**. What do I mean by that? We're lazy with the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet, this doctrine has been argued and articulated from the beginning days of the church. But, maybe you've even said things like, "Dear Father, thank you for dying on the cross." Or, maybe you've said, "Well, Jesus was just praying to himself because he's God." Or, have you ever thought, "Is the Holy Spirit really God? He's not really mentioned much in the Old Testament, is he?" All these statements reveal a lack of understanding of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And even the lack of understanding of the name of God himself.

Fifth, because **salvation is at stake**. If Jesus did not take the wrath of God on himself or if Jesus is not God but simply a superior being, where does this leave us in salvation? How can blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be an unforgiveable sin if he is not God? And how can we be saved to worship Jesus if God alone is only worthy of worship?

Fifth, because **we are created in God's image**. If Genesis 1 (and the Scriptures as a whole) teach us that our value and meaning come from being created in God's image, and if the Scriptures reveal a communal nature to God himself, then it's important that we know this communal God or else we will destroy our relationships with one another. The knowledge of God as Triune will shape how we live as male and female with other males and females in this world!

So, let's think of this sermon series as a reintroduction to God as Triune and in some ways as a New Year's exercise resolution. Let's remove the theological flabbiness and rejoice all the more in what it means to be created in God's image. Today, we're focusing on the communal nature of God and also the communal nature of humans. The big idea of this sermon is that **God's nature necessitates our need for community**. As I said earlier, Genesis 1 is our primary passage. And so, what I'm going to do is focus on the nature of God first and then move to the nature of humans.

Before we jump in, turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1, and then let me pray for us [Pray for Harriette Dekker; Harbor Church; Martins]. I'm going to read a few verses from Genesis 1, starting with verses 1-4:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 2

[Now let's read verse 26]

26 Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:1–4.

livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”³

1. God is communal within himself.

I want to emphasize this by focusing on how Genesis describes God’s *nature* and then how this chapter emphasizes his *actions*. After all, God’s actions flow from his nature.

God’s Nature

We get hints to the communal nature of God immediately in Genesis 1. The word for “God” used here in chapter 1 is the word “Elohim.” Now, honestly, this word can be confusing. “Elohim” can be referencing angels. But, that wouldn’t make sense in this context. Angels are never referenced as being the Creator! In addition, this word for “Elohim” is in the plural Hebrew form. That’s why some think this must be angelic. Others turn to a different explanation. They’ll say that this term is used as a “plural of majesty.” In certain instances throughout history, monarchs might refer to themselves in the plural. There’s records of Alexander the Great referring to himself this way. So, you can imagine a King saying, “We will grant your request.”

However, there is no evidence of examples of this usage in the ancient Hebrew world. So, we get to verse 26 and read, “Let *us* make man in *our* image. . . .” In Genesis 3:22, God says, “. . . man has become like one of *us*. . . .” In Genesis 11:7, we read, “Come, let *us* go down, and there confuse their language.” Then in Isaiah 6:8, when God speaks to Isaiah, he says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?”

From Genesis 1, we get this understanding that God is communal. The term Elohim strongly indicates this, being mentioned 32 times in this chapter. And then the end of verse 2 gives a hint at this as well. God created the heavens and the earth and the Spirit of God was hovering. The Spirit of God is part of creating with God.

At this point, I’m going to go outside of Genesis, where we also read in John 1:1-3, “**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”⁴

While not close to being fully fleshed out in Genesis 1 and John 1 we can get ideas that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are One in creation and One as Creator. Or, I could also say that God, within himself is *communal*. Now, why does it matter to know this? There are people who could think that God created everything because he was bored or he felt alone and needed fellowship with other beings. Maybe God was kind of like a person who feels the need for a dog or a cat as a pet. This is a very bad picture of God because the Bible teaches us that God has no needs. And, he doesn’t *need* community because he’s communal within himself. For all eternity past, he has been in perfect fellowship as the Three-in-One.

Now, does this make sense? No. Is this what the Scriptures teach us? Yes! If we had a God that could always fit in our boxes then we wouldn’t have God, we would have another figment of Creation. But

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:26.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:1–3.

God is above and beyond creation. Therefore, mysteries to us are a part of his nature. So, his nature is revealed as a plural-in-one in Genesis 1. Now, let's see if his actions emphasize this as well.

God's Actions

In Genesis 1, the phrase "its (or, their) kind" is repeated 9 times. This type of repetition should get noticed as well. God creates land animals, water animals, plants. He causes them to reproduce according to their kinds. God designs for multiplication of each kind. What we see here is God creating "communities." One kind, but many coming from each kind.

Then we get to verse 26 and the attention gets on God's privilege given to humans. Let's read verses 26-31 together:

26 Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. 5

Isn't it phenomenal that with the animal and plants, God called them to reproduce according to their kind, but when God created humans he said that he was going to make them in his image? Humanity's identity is based in the nature of God. God doesn't create one human, but two. And these two humans aren't simply to reproduce according to their kind. But the emphasis is that they are uniquely based in the character and nature of God himself.

As a result, humans are made for communion with God, unlike any other creature. And, they are made for a beautiful community to rule over and to live within.

What we see in Genesis 1 is that he is at least a plural-in-One. And, to reveal his nature, he created a diverse world in which there is also unity. At the pinnacle of the creation are beings who are more like God than anything else: humans. This brings to the second main point.

2. Humans are communal.

Let's look at this from the perspective of human's nature and then human's actions.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:26–31.

Human's Nature

In verse 27, Moses writes in poetic form saying God created man in his own image. . . male and female he created *them*. Wait a second. How is God creating male and female mean he's created people in God's image? Being in God's image involves community. Now, that doesn't mean that just as there are two humans, there are two gods. No. Or, as the humans will procreate, so God procreates and there are infinite gods. The Bible doesn't teach these things. The point is that God is communal within himself and he has created a world in which he makes beings who need other beings.

So, let's have a little Trinity lesson here. This one always confuses my children, but I'll say that God is one being, and in that one being there are three persons. But with humans, we are one being and one person at the same time. God is One being and Three persons at the same time. Make sense? No! But, even the ancient church worded it this way being its at least logically consistent. You can't be one being and three beings. You can't be one person and three persons. But you can be one being and three persons. We don't know how that works, but it's true.

Now, getting back to Genesis. Humans are one being and one person. But there are two human beings. Male and female he made them. Genesis (and the rest of Scriptures) teach us that there are only two genders. We have no indication anywhere else in Scripture of more than two – and we have Jesus repeating marriage between male and female. In Genesis 1, everything that's being created is perfect and is magnifying the nature and glory of God. And, this includes the beauty of two genders. Now, in our day, there's arguments over limiting the number of genders. But throughout time (and in our day as well) there are also arguments over the value of genders. Some look down on men. Others look down on woman. There's been oppression over genders throughout the centuries. And, I think it's because there's a lack of understanding of both being created in God's image and also magnifying God's image together.

I recall one time reading a story of a woman who was a progressive feminist who was against what men accomplished in the western world. In her efforts to counter certain things that were wicked, she began to realize she was simply becoming like the men she was against. She was fighting for "fairness" and "justice" but that meant that women had to be superior to men.

I know some will say, "But isn't there male chauvinism in this world?" Yes. But the answer to that is not to say that female's are the superior gender. And, it's not right for men to say they're the superior gender either! In God's order, men and women are equal in value as image-bearers. And together, in community, men and women manifest the image of God in greater ways. Humans were made for communion – with God and other humans. Together, we were made to manifest God's glory!

Human's Actions

And to manifest God's glory is a wondrous privilege. Humans aren't special just because they have the greatest survival techniques. In Genesis 1, we see humans aren't the main character. God is the main character. He creates beauty, wonder, glory – and then creates male and female to shine forth his glory in this world. In us being communal, we are emphasizing *his* glory. Three times in these final verses of Genesis 1, we're told humans are made in his image. He's the point!

The reality of being created in God's image also emphasizes our individual value as humans. Every single human is created in God's image and together, they manifest his image more fully. This means that every human is created with value and dignity. This is why the general Christian message through the

centuries has valued the life of children and babies in the womb. Humans are set apart by God to manifest his glory individually and within community.

I love how one author communicates about this phrase of being created in the image of God. Some will say that being created in his image means we have higher mental faculties or we have a body and a soul. Or, body, soul and spirit. Others will speculate various answers. But I think this phrase means that we are more like God than anything else in creation. Our identities are bound up in God in a unique way and we are to display his glory to each other and also to the rest of the world. The text goes on and says that we are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it. Every human being was created to rule. This doesn't mean every human being is to be a King or Queen or President. But we rule in caring for and being creative within this creation that is God's *with* fellow image-bearers.

Now, let's put this all together for us as humans. **Our task as humans is to be vice-regents, rulers under the Ruler, glorifying God in community and caring for his creation.** So, what are some implications of this in our day?

Do you value community? If you are the type of person who tends more to be alone and apart from people, you're missing out. I'm not saying that being an introvert is necessarily sinful. But I am saying that if you don't seek to be in community with others, you are sinning. Sometimes we can use our natural propensities as excuses to not do what we were created for. How do you view men and women? Do you have a respect and value for both men and women? This includes your spouse, your children, fellow church members, classmates, co-workers. We are all called to *rule* in this world. In future weeks, we are going to show how God has designed us differently on purpose to fulfill certain roles. But for now, my question is simply, "How do you view men and women?" When we minimize a gender, we fail to glorify God as we ought to because that gender is created for the maximization of his glory!

These are just two questions, but I'm sure you could think of others. Yet, in bringing out these questions, and making these statements I'm sure all of us can see how we have failed in our calling as humans. Have you imaged forth God's glory perfectly? Do you engage in sexual perversion in any way? Do you seek to care for the unborn? What about helping single mothers? God has made humans as one race. Yet, we have truly failed and brought pain on ourselves, haven't we?

A few months ago when I was studying the book of Genesis, I was in awe of God's creation, as revealed in chapters 1-2. Then I went into chapter 3 where Eve is tempted and I saw our Adam and Eve failed their tasks. They together did not glorify God. There was a rebel in the garden. As rulers, they should have kicked the serpent out. They should have glorified God. Then Eve listens to the temptations and she wants to be at the level of God. Adam must have as well because he's with her and doesn't say a thing. Adam and Eve become rebels as well.

When caught by God, God pronounces judgments over them and declares what will happen. One of the curses is that male and female relationships will be in tension. In 3:15, we read, "**Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.**"⁶ Before sin, there are revelations that Adam was the leader and Eve submitted (that's another sermon). But this phrase for rule has the idea of superiority of value. It's a sinfulness. The first phrase can either mean that Eve will long for her husband's approval (which would be idolatry because she's not looking to God). Or, this phrase could mean that she wants the

⁶ [The New King James Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ge 3:16.

control. Whatever way you take this, part of the results of the fall is that male/female relationships have gone haywire. Humans have sought to be at the level of God and instead they've descended to the level of a rebel. And, even in our day, we live out this tension between men and women – and men with men and women with women. Because we have turned from our Triune God, our human race (or, human community) has unraveled in disarray.

Yet, there is hope. Even this rebellion of humans cannot stop God's intention to magnify himself through humans. I read from John 1 earlier in this sermon, and the way John writes is intended to mimic the Genesis 1 creation account: ³ **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.** ⁴ **In him was life, and the life was the light of men.** ⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** ⁷

Jesus, who was with God and is God, comes into this world as a human being. He who was in perfect communion with God the Father and is God, takes on human flesh. And when he comes into this world, he comes as *light* in the darkness. What John is indicating is that just as the world began with God bringing light into the world, a new creation begins with Jesus coming into the world as light. Did you hear that? I'm going to repeat that phrase again because this is important to hear as I move to an end of this sermon.

Jesus is the light of the world, and as the light, he is perfect. The Bible tells us that he knew no sin, there was no deceit found in him whatsoever. Then he was tested in a wilderness, somewhat like Adam and Eve. In that wilderness, Jesus resisted the serpent and honored God. The gospels tell us he obeyed by walking in the Spirit. And walked out of that temptation and began a miraculous ministry of healing and forgiving people's sins – pointing towards a future new creation. His light will overcome the darkness. He honored the Father and the Spirit!

Yet, it did seem darkness had won when people worked together to defy Jesus and murder him. Those who were created to Rule under God's rule, glorifying God in community, instead they rebelled against God again and wanted the Son of God dead. He did die on that cross and on the cross, Jesus confessed he was being forsaken by God. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus was actually there taking the rebellion of humanity on himself and God punished the Son in place of sinners! Then Jesus died the death that sinners deserved. Yet, because Jesus is God, he rose from the dead and conquered death.

What does all of this mean? Well, in the letter of 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, the apostle Paul writes this: ¹⁷ **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.**⁸ What's interesting is if you have a KJV or NKJV, you'll see italicized words. Those italicized words indicate that those words aren't in the Greek. They've been placed by translators to try to give what they think the sense of the verse is. The more literal Greek of this is, "If anyone is in Christ, new creation!" Does this mean that if I'm in Christ, I'm a new creation?

What's interesting is that there is no evidence anywhere else in literature of the phrase "new creation" ever being individual. What would fit the bigger theological storyline is that Paul is saying that if anyone is in Christ, they are a part of the new creation! They're experiencing the days of the new creation so-to-speak. Jesus, the light of the world, came into the world and overcame the darkness of sin and death. And now, the Bible tells us that if you turn from your rebellion and turn to God for forgiveness, you are placed into a new creation that will culminate in a New Heaven and a New Earth. Until that time, if you

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:2–5.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 5:17.

trust Jesus alone as your rescuer and forgiveness, then you have been granted the ability to live out God's purpose of you magnifying him as a human being with other human beings. Just as in the first creation, God calls humans to live in community and rule; so in the new creation. God the Father, sent the Son (as Light) into this world by the Spirit over the waters of Mary's womb. Now, the new creation is on the move and within the church, we live to magnify God and to love one another. And, we also seek to display that love to the world around us as a community of people who have been rescued, saved and made new!

That 2 Corinthians passage goes on to say:

The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you⁹

Our Triune God created the world and called them to honor him. We failed. Our Triune God sent Jesus as the Light of the new creation in order to honor him. Jesus succeeds! And in that success, we who are his followers, live! Being reconciled to God through Jesus means that we appeal to the world around us to come back to know our glorious God! God, through Christ, is reconciling the world to himself! Not only this, because we are a part of the new creation, we have restored fellowship with others who are believers in Christ. And, within the local church and in our homes, we should live out the beauty of what it means to be image-bearers of God as male and female.

Jesus restores and gives greater than what humans ever had! And, in the weeks to come, we'll unpack more of what that means. At this point, I pray that you will seek to begin to grow in awe of our Triune God who will shape how you live and behave with others around you. Therefore, it's fitting to end this sermon with Paul's final words of 2 Corinthians: **¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ¹⁰**

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 5:17–6:1.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 13:14.